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THE MODERN READER'S
HAMLET

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OF NEW YORK

THE MODERN READER'S
HAMLET

BY

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PREFACE

Any tampering with the text of Shakespeare with an intent to "improve" it would meet and deserve among thinking people just censure. Such effort would be comparable to that of painting the lily. The contents of the present volume are intended to supplement Shakespeare, not to supplant him. The latter would be not only presumptuous but no doubt ludicrous in its result. The intent here has been not substitution but simplification. An attempt has been made to render a current English paraphrase of the Elizabethan text. The original language and word-order of Shakespeare have been modified as little as possible to make the meaning absolutely clear. In the Introduction the essence of classic criticism with respect to the eternal Hamlet problem has been briefly reviewed, but, more important than that, the very latest Hamlet criticism, somewhat condensed to be sure, has been included, notably that of Freud, Masefield, Lowes, Kittredge, and Neilson and Thorndike. The Freudian Hamlet is particularly interesting in this twentieth century in view of the world-wide interest in psychoanalysis manifested at present, and the constant trend in modern psychology toward the behaviouristic.

In the preparation of this work due and constant reference has been made to the principal accepted editions of Shakespeare circulating in the English-speaking countries at present, notably the monumental Variorum of Furness (1877), the Globe of Clark and Wright (1864), the Clarendon (second edition) of the same editors (1871), the Arden of Dowden, the Lake of Neilson, the Tudor of Neilson and Thorndike, the Warwick of Chambers, the universal Hudson, the Booklover's of Gollancz, the Rolfe, Abbott's justly celebrated Shakespearian Grammar, and to the etymological dictionaries of Skeat and Murray. Many of these works were made accessible through the kindness of attendants in the Harvard College Library, and the Harper Memorial Library of the University of Chicago. To Woodworth's Book Shop, Chicago, the author feels a debt of gratitude. To George Lyman Kittredge, professor of English at Harvard, one of the greatest teachers of Shakespeare in the United States, and to President William Allan Neilson, of Smith College, also former professor of English at Harvard, the author owes a debt of inspiration and stimulation in the study of Elizabethan English. To John Matthews Manly,

head of the English department, emeritus, at the University of Chicago, also a celebrated teacher of Shakespeare, thanks are due for several suggestions utilized in the present volume.

H. M.

January, 1922.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

I. SOURCES OF THE PLOT

Most editions of *Hamlet* annotated for school use or for the independent reader begin with learned and technical discussions of sources, early editions, and problems of textual criticism. It will be the purpose of this edition, in addition to presenting a "modernized" text, to reduce these preliminaries to lowest terms consistent with safe scholarship. The character of Hamlet, half-legendary, half-historical, strikingly resembles that of King Arthur. The Hamlet legend had its roots in a Scandinavian folk-tale.¹ The story is first crystallized by Saxo Grammaticus² in his *Historica Danica*, written presumably about 1204. In Saxo's version, the historical prince, who may have lived, coeval with King Arthur, about 500 B. C., slays his uncle, but ascends the throne of Denmark instead of being slain himself at the moment. Later, Hamlet is assassinated through the machinations of a treacherous wife. Saxo's history was translated into French by Francis de Belleforest in 1570. In 1608 there appeared in London an English translation or reprint of de Belleforest, which bore the title *The Historie of Hamblet*. Prior to this year, however, and prior to Shakespeare's play, a drama about Hamlet seems to have been popular in Elizabethan London. It is referred to in the year 1598 in Thomas Nash's preface to

¹ See *Hamlet in Iceland (Ambales Saga)* by Israel Gollancz, the introduction.

² Saxo, the Learned.

Green's *Menaphon*. Some scholars believe this pre-Shakespearean *Hamlet* to have been from the pen of Thomas Kyd, since Shakespeare's version resembles in certain striking dramatic features, notably in the introduction of a ghost, in the play within a play, and in repeated lengthy soliloquies, that author's *Spanish Tragedie*.

II. EARLY EDITIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S HAMLET

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in all probability had not yet been written in 1598. Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia*, published in that year, contains a list of twelve Shakespearean plays, but not *Hamlet*. It had been written by July 26, 1602. On that date it was first registered in *The Stationers' Registers*, London. This first edition is known as the First Quarto. A quarto here means a single play in a single volume. Some of Shakespeare's plays were never published originally in quarto form. *Macbeth* is an example, which first appeared in the First Folio, 1623. A folio is a virtually complete collection of plays in one big volume. Thus *Hamlet* appeared in both quarto and folio form.

The first record of *Hamlet*, entered in July, 1602, significantly does not have the name of Shakespeare registered. It does, however, refer to the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a company of actors of which Shakespeare himself is known to have been a member up to the time of the accession of James I. in May, 1603. The First Quarto is, therefore, frequently referred to as a pirated, unauthorized edition. It may have been taken down in shorthand by some one in the audience with an eye to personal gain. This was in the days antedating exclusive copyright. No copy of this very imperfect and corrupt edition of 1603 was discovered until 1823, when Sir Henry Bunbury came across one. A second (now in the British Museum)

was found in 1856. In 1604, the Second Quarto, twice as long as the First, and incredibly improved, was published. Shakespeare's name appeared on the title-page. This was the first edition authorized by the author, who terms it "according to the true and perfect copy." A Third Quarto appeared in 1605. A Fourth appeared in 1611. A Fifth Quarto, undated, but now estimated at 1607-09, is next in order of arranged texts. Finally, the sixth reprinting of *Hamlet* appears in the First Folio, 1623. From this time on there was never any danger of the play becoming extinct. Thus *Hamlet* achieved probably five editions in the lifetime of the poet. *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard the Second* rank next in popularity with four editions each before his death.

III. THE HAMLET PROBLEM

The so-called Hamlet problem is presented in lines 29-31 of Act I, Scene 5:

Hamlet: "Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge."

But throughout the five acts of the play Hamlet completely fails to "sweep" to his revenge. This curious fact constitutes the crux of the plot, "the Hamlet Mystery."

IV. FIVE CLASSIC SOLUTIONS OF THE HAMLET PROBLEM

Of the five classic attempts by eminent scholars and poets to solve the baffling problem of Hamlet's conduct, the first four are subjective (the fourth being purely pathological), and the fifth is objective, or based solely on external circumstances.

The first and most famous is the so-called "sentimental" theory of Goethe, leading poet of Germany, advanced in his *Wilhelm Meister* (1795). Coming

from such an eminent source, every consideration is due this opinion. Following is a free translation from the German (IV, 3-13; V, 4-11):

"The time is out of joint; O cursed spite,
That I was ever born to set it right!"

"In these words, I presume, is to be discovered the the key to Hamlet's entire course of action. To me it is clear that Shakespeare attempted to disclose, in the present instance, the effects of a great deed laid upon a soul unequal to the performance of it. In this view the entire play seems composed, it appears to me. An oak-tree is planted in a costly vase, which should have borne only lovely flowers in its bosom; the roots spread, the vase is shattered. A supremely attractive, pure, noble and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which goes to constitute the hero, sinks beneath a burden which it neither can bear nor cast aside. All duties to him are holy,—this one too hard. That which is impossible is required of him,—not the inherently impossible, but the impossible to him. He twists and turns, and tortures himself; he advances and reacts; is ever reminded and self-reminding; and at the last all but does lose sight of his purpose, yet ever without restoring his peace of mind."

In view of Hamlet's ultimate triumph over Claudius, this theory cannot be sustained. Bradley, in his epoch-making *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904), remarks acutely:

"Consider the text. This shrinking, flower-like youth,—how could he possibly have done what we see Hamlet do? What likeness to him is there in the Hamlet who, summoned by the Ghost, bursts from his terrified companions with the cry:

'Unhand me, gentlemen!
By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me!'

the Hamlet who scarcely once speaks to the King without insult, or to Polonius without a gibe; the Hamlet

who storms at Ophelia and speaks daggers to his mother; the Hamlet who, hearing a cry behind the arras, whips out his sword in an instant and runs the eavesdropper through; the Hamlet who sends his school-fellows to their death and never troubles his head about them more; the Hamlet who is the first man to board a pirate ship, and who fights with Laertes in the grave; the Hamlet of the catastrophe, an omnipotent fate, before whom all the court stands helpless, who, as the truth breaks upon him, rushes on the King, drives his foil right through his body, then seizes the poisoned cup and forces it violently between the wretched man's lips, and in the throes of death has force and fire enough to wrest the cup from Horatio's hand ('By heaven, I'll have it!') lest he should drink and die? This man, the Hamlet of the play, is a heroic, terrible figure. He would have been formidable to Othello or Macbeth. If the sentimental Hamlet had crossed him, he would have hurled him from his path with one sweep of his arm."

The second of the celebrated subjective theories as to Hamlet's course of action in delaying revenge is the alleged "weakness of will" theory, advanced almost synchronously by Coleridge in England (in his *Notes and Lectures upon Shakespeare*) and by Schlegel in Germany (see Black's translation of Schlegel's *Ueber dramatische Kunst und Litteratur*) shortly after 1800. For convenience it is known either as the "weakness of will theory" or the Schlegel-Coleridge theory. Coleridge remarks in part:

"In the healthy process of the mind, a balance is constantly maintained between the impressions from outward objects and the inward operations of the intellect; for if there be an overbalance in the contemplative faculty, man thereby becomes the creature of mere meditation, and loses his natural power of action. . . . In Hamlet . . . we see a great, an almost enormous,

intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it."

Schlegel finds the key to the play in an identical hypothesis and quotes the hero of the drama as evidence:

"And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;
And enterprises of great pith and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action."

Further Schlegel declares that Hamlet does not believe in himself or anything else. "He loses himself in labyrinths of thought." The fatal objection to the Schlegel-Coleridge theory is that it detaches Hamlet from the drama considered as a whole, and attributes to him a personal defect of nature which may neither be justifiable nor fair to him. It is unsafe to assume, as does Coleridge, that Shakespeare creates a character with a "faculty in morbid excess, and places himself, Shakespeare, thus mutilated or diseased, under given circumstances." Dare we assume that Hamlet, the magnificent, is mentally "mutilated or diseased?"

A third theory seeking to account for Hamlet's delay is the "conscience" theory of Ulrici (see Morrison's translation of Ulrici's *Shakespeare's dramatische Kunst*). Hamlet, says Ulrici, is restrained by conscience from putting the King to death without a trial and without justice. This theory is exploded by the fact that it does not consider the historical background of the age, which permitted and even made obligatory retaliative revenge; and Hamlet bitterly reproaches himself more than once for his lack of promptness in its execution.

The fourth theory is a celebrated one from the standpoint of historical controversy. It assumes that Hamlet, at least at times, is insane. Melancholia, hysteria, psychic epilepsy, neurasthenia, madness or whatever you will, has been presented in turn to explain Hamlet's

procrastination. Nearly all proponents of the madness hypothesis admit, however, that Hamlet had lucid intervals. As a matter of fact, the only defense of this theory that can be made is that pathological research has never yet been able to draw a sharp line of demarcation between sanity and insanity. Ibsen has demonstrated this dramatically in *Hedda Gabler*. Not all insane people are confined in madhouses any more than all criminals are now behind prison walls. But what is a criminal? If a man steals a trifle is he a criminal? Similarly, insanity may be a constant but slight and imperceptible over-tension of the nerves as well as the wild raving of a maniac. So declares Ibsen in *Hedda Gabler*. But ninety-five per cent of all scholars nevertheless reject the madness theory. Hamlet distinctly asserts in the first act that he is going "to put an antic disposition on." George Henry Miles, in 1870, declared with finality:

"There is never a storm in *Hamlet* over which the 'noble and most sovereign reason' of the young prince is not as visibly dominant as the rainbow, the crowning grace and glory of the scene. . . . The most salient phase of Hamlet's character is his superb intellectual superiority to all comers."

The fifth theory commonly advanced to account for Hamlet's delay differs from the four preceding in that it attributes the prince's hesitation to objective, external circumstances and to the environment in which Hamlet is placed and is therefore unable to control, rather than to internal, subjective causes. As early as 1803 the actor Ziegler wrote and published an analysis of the play on this basis. Ziegler said that Hamlet delayed because of external difficulties,—mainly "the quick, glittering swords of the (King's) bodyguard, or the cold array of judges condemning the slayer of the King." This theory, however, was made more widely known by L. Klein (see Cohn's translation of Klein's *Berliner*

Modenspiegel, 1846, in Furness's *Variorum Hamlet*) and Karl Werder (*Vorlesungen ueber Shakespeare's Hamlet*, Berlin, 1875). It is commonly known as the Klein-Werder theory. Briefly, it is that Hamlet fails to act because of a desire publicly to unmask the King's guilt, and thus to prevent summary justice being executed against himself who had neither evidence nor reason to offer in support of cold-blooded murder. Professor Bradley, quoted once before, disposes of the Klein-Werder theory thus: "From beginning to end of the play, Hamlet never makes the slightest reference to any external difficulties. Not only does Hamlet fail to allude to such difficulties, but he always assumes that he *can* obey the Ghost, and he once asserts this in so many words ('Sith I have cause and will and strength and means To do't': IV-4-45)."

Since these five theories probably are inadequate to explain Hamlet's delay, it will be necessary to advance a sixth, which we shall call the ethical theory. This theory does not take the liberty of detaching Hamlet from the play. It considers him rather as a lens through which are focussed the universal realities lying behind the action of the drama.

V. THE ETHICAL HAMLET

In solving the Hamlet problem it will now be apparent that deductive rather than inductive logic must be used. For inductive reasoning,—that of drawing a generalization from a specific instance—has led eighteenth and nineteenth century Hamlet criticism into pitfalls and blind-alleys. The general design of the play must be worked out and a specific conclusion drawn as to Hamlet's impelling motive in delaying his revenge. This is deductive reasoning. Assuming that Hamlet is abnormal in some phase of his being is manifestly unfair, as we have seen, because all evidence when as-

sembled is overwhelmingly against such supposition. We shall then assume that Hamlet is normal, intellectual, righteous, in full possession of his powers, and honor bound by the traditions and customs of his day, to "revenge his father's foul and most unnatural murder." Obviously the solution of the problem must rest on a perfectly normal basis.

Hear John Masefield, foremost of living English poets:

"The powers outside life send a poor ghost to Hamlet to prompt him to an act of justice. After baffled hours, often interrupted by cock-crow, he gives his message. Hamlet is charged with the double task of executing judgment and showing mercy. . . . The task set by the dead is a simple one. All tasks are simple to the simple-minded. To the delicate and complex mind so much of life is bound up with every act that any violent act involves not only a large personal sacrifice of ideal, but a tearing-up by the roots of half the order of the world. . . . Hamlet is neither 'weak' nor 'unpractical,' as so many call him. What he hesitates to do may be necessary, or even just, as the world goes, but it is a defilement of personal ideals, difficult for a wise mind to justify. It is so great a defilement, and a world so composed is so great a defilement that death seems preferable to action and existence alike."⁸

In other words, a high ethical motive constantly restrains the Prince of Denmark from carrying into execution his promise to the Ghost. At the climax of the play, as the King kneels in prayer and Hamlet relinquishes his supreme opportunity to commit the act of murder, it is, says Masefield, because of "the knowledge that the sword will not reach the real man, since damnation comes from within, not from without."

In fact, Hamlet's supreme characteristic is morality.

⁸ John Masefield: *Shakespeare* (Henry Holt & Co., 1911), pp. 160-162. An exceedingly brilliant treatise in style and thought.

He is constantly arrested in his impulses to do the deed by a superior code of ethics. Masfield advances the concept of idealism, which is to the point.

Hamlet is essentially a religious character, using that somewhat unctuous and oversentimentalized word in its broadest, best, and sanest sense. In this respect he is "humanity individualized," since religion is man's supremest characteristic, and man everywhere is the child of God if he so wills. This religious essence of Hamlet's nature is evidenced by two facts. The first is that the language of *Hamlet* parallels that of the Bible, and is almost as familiar by quotation in common speech. The second is that Hamlet everywhere weighs the Divine Will against human volition, as was anciently done in Gethsemane. This is particularly true in the long soliloquies:

"That the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (I-2-131-132)

is the consideration which restrains him from suicide in the First Act.

In Act II-2-298-303:

"What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?"

Compare with Hebrews 2:6-8 (a redaction of Psalm 8:4-6):

"What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands. Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet."

In Act II-2-585-592 Hamlet cannot bring himself to trust the integrity of the Ghost on account of religious scruples:

"The spirit that I have seen
 May be the devil; and the devil hath power
 T' assume a pleasing shape; yea, and
 perhaps
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
 As he is potent with such spirits,
 Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds
 More relative than this. The play's
 the thing
 Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the
 King."

Again, the immortal, beautiful soliloquy of Act III-
 1-11. 65-88, repeats the sentiment of that of Act I-
 scene 2. Suicide is not a true solution for the ills of
 humanity because of

"the dread of something after death,
 The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
 Than fly to others that we know not of."

The climactic soliloquy of Act III-scene 3, whereby
 Hamlet misses his best chance to kill Claudius, we have
 noted before in the quotation of Masfield. In scene 4
 Hamlet urges his mother:

"Confess yourself to heaven;
 Repent what's past, avoid what is to come."

At the grave of Ophelia Hamlet further meditates
 on the mystery of death. In the brawl with Laertes
 he offers to outvie Laertes in "drinking eisel",—to out-
 rival the agony of the Crucified One.

Finally, the Prince believes his deliverance into the
 hands of the pirates an act of Providence:

"Our indiscretion sometimes serves
 us well
 When our deep plots do pall; and
 that should teach us
There's a divinity that shapes
 our ends,
 Rough hew them how we will." (V-2-11. 8-11)

In the last hours of Hamlet's life, when danger is instinctively felt to be impending, the following dialogue takes place:

Hamlet: "It is but foolery; but it is such a kind of gaingiving as would perhaps trouble a woman."

Horatio: "If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not fit."

Hamlet: "Not a whit; we defy augury. There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow."

(V-2-ll. 206-211)

Hamlet's faith teaches him that Divine Providence circumscribes and controls in their final issues the affairs of men. Thus, just previous to the preceding dialogue, Hamlet has come to look at Claudius' deeds from the relative as well as the absolute standpoint:

"— is't not perfect conscience
To quit him with this arm? and is't
not to be damn'd,
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?" (III-2-ll. 67-70.)

For "canker of our nature" read "cancer of humanity." That is Shakespeare's meaning. It is now a duty to slay Claudius for a broader reason than merely a personal reason. The social welfare demands it. The King must be brought to justice. If Hamlet is the instrument of Divine Justice, since God operates in this world through human agencies, he is satisfied. The chance occasion of a fencing-bout opens the way. As Masfield remarks:

"Revenge and chance together restore life to her course, by a destruction of the lives too beastly, and of the lives too hasty, and of the lives too foolish, and of the life too wise, to be altogether on earth at the same time."

V. THE UNIVERSAL HAMLET

Man, made in the image of God, is essentially a religious creature. Man is either moral or immoral

dependent upon whether he lives up to or beneath his privileges. The Bible does not generally speak disparagingly of man, but regards him as the eternal child of an Eternal Father. Man, a sentient creature, cannot be unmoral. Only children, animals, and imbeciles are unmoral. Hamlet's idealism and code of ethics lead him to live up to his privileges. In the religious passages quoted in the preceding section, we have shown that J. Churton Collins was right when he said:

"Hamlet is not so much an individual as humanity individualized, not so much man in integrity as man in solution."⁴

William Hazlitt's now classic criticism is well known:⁵

"Hamlet is a name; his speeches and sayings but the idle coinage of a poet's brain. What, then, are they not real? They are as real as our own thoughts. The reality is in the reader's mind. It is *we* who are Hamlet."

Thus, *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's *Thanatopsis*. The soliloquies, actuated by the mainspring of morality, the Divine element in the human mind, are the universal human strivings to fathom the mysteries of life and its meaning, of death, of eternity and immortality, of the workings of Divine Providence in the affairs of men, and of the realm of duty. The triumph of faith is as inevitable in *Hamlet* as in *Revelation*.

Hamlet, 1603, and the King James Bible, 1611, are inextricably interwoven in language and thought.

VI. THE FREUDIAN HAMLET

The uniquely twentieth century contribution to the world's ever-increasing library of Hamlet literature is that of Sigmund Freud, of the University of Vienna,

⁴*The Contemporary Review*, November, 1905.

⁵*Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (Everyman's Library).

one of the most eminent of living psychologists, in his *Die Traumdeutung* (1909). The psychoanalytic diagnosis of Hamlet was further elaborated the next year by Ernest Jones, in *The Œdipus Complex as Explanation of Hamlet's Mystery*. (*American Journal of Psychology*, January, 1910.) Freud is an expert in mental pathology, but it does not follow necessarily that his revolutionary doctrine of psychoanalysis does not concern the activity of the normal mind and normal human behaviour. The Freudian theory is that mental life is made up of "complexes." A "complex" is a group of ideas associated with a single experience or series of related experiences, including a memory of the emotional colouring enveloping those experiences. If they are unpleasant, a so-called "censor" which constantly stands on guard at the threshold of consciousness, banishes them voluntarily back into the subconscious. This, according to Freud, is "repression," and is the cause of a vast percentage of mental and nervous disorders. When these rise to the surface of consciousness through some new channel, a neurosis, or pathological condition is the result. Usually the neurosis takes the form of hysteria. John Bunyan was apparently a victim of religious hysteria, if we read *Grace Abounding* aright. St. Paul appears to have been a neurotic, and mentions visions and trances as playing an important part in his singularly dramatic conversion and subsequent career. Lady Macbeth's neurosis took the form of somnambulism. In hysteria and in dreams, repressions become expressions. Man's dreams, according to Freud, are often recrudescences of the infantile mind of the human race. Often the problem is reduced to a psycho-sexual problem. Thus, a boy loves his mother and a girl her father more, due to the nature of the fundamental sex-complexes. Freud psychoanalyzes Shakespeare with reference to *Hamlet* thus in *Die Traumdeutung*:

"Shakespeare early lost a son by the name of Hamnet. As in *Hamlet* there was treated the relation of the son to the father, so in *Macbeth* there is treated the theme of childlessness. Thus we may be able to search out the meaning of the deep emotions in the minds of the creative poets."

Ernest Jones, in the article previously mentioned, develops the Freudian theory of repression as a possible key to Hamlet's seemingly enigmatic behaviour in the light of the Oedipus legend as related by Sophocles. Jones joins modern constructive criticism in agreeing that Hamlet's obstacle in attaining immediate revenge was a series of internal conflicts and was not due to external circumstances. The Freudian-Jones hypothesis is that Hamlet's inhibition consisted of a psycho-sexual repression. That repression was his love for his mother, and it was more deep and powerful than his love for his dead father. It outweighed and overmastered for the time Hamlet's personal hostilities. As he slays Claudius, the first adjective that springs to the Prince's lips is the word "incestuous." It was concern for his mother that seems finally to spur him to an infuriated violence of revenge: (V-2-ll. 299-317.)

VII. THE GHOST

The Ghost in Hamlet is the most famous ghost in all literature. It is the culmination of an apostolic succession of famous mediæval conceptions, of the days when people universally believed in witches, fairies, ghosts, goblins, elves, devils, angels, and a myriad of other creatures of fancy. Witchcraft, magic, angelology and demonology, and similar beliefs survive to an astonishing degree in the modern world. We cannot with justice accuse Shakespeare of grossly superstitious belief. Whether he actually believed in ghosts is uncertain, but the presumption is strong that he did.

Most Elizabethans did. But we of the twentieth century dare not cast the first stone. In an age of faith in ouija-boards and mesmeric revelation, of dire prognostication attached to broken mirrors and umbrellas raised indoors, let us reserve carping criticism. The supernatural elements so vividly introduced into James Whitcomb Riley's *Little Orphant Annie* and the New Testament are part and parcel of the faith of millions of twentieth century folks.

Maurice Francis Egan, former United States minister to Denmark and a distinguished modern critic and college professor of English, writing specifically on the problem of the Ghost in *Hamlet*, says:⁶

"It did not surprise the English at the beginning of the seventeenth century that the murdered King should come from the state of purgation in which many Englishmen still believed. . . . The Ghost, to the auditors at the theatre in London, represented the State. . . . The accent on the military appearance of the King is (therefore) deepened. . . . The state is wounded in his royal person. To paraphrase Louis XIV, 'L'état, c'est lui'. In striking down religion, truth, loyalty, the very essence and flower of law and order . . . Claudius was the regicide, the enemy of society, the outlaw. . . . Auditors of today do not look on the divinity that formerly hedged a king as a quality of daily life."

Thus adequately to understand the Ghost in *Hamlet* requires a historical knowledge of seventeenth century Europe.

Masefield refers to the Ghost as an agent of "the powers outside life" who came to Hamlet "to prompt him to an act of justice." An anonymous writer in *Blackwood's* for February, 1818, alludes to the Ghost as one who carries us "into the presence of eternity."

⁶ *The Ghost in Hamlet and Other Essays* (A. C. McClurg & Co., 1906), pp. 13-47.

VIII. CLAUDIUS

"Hamlet is not the tragedy of a weak-willed procrastinator, of the contemplative nature challenged by fate to fill the rôle of a man of action. On the contrary, it is the tragedy not of an individual but of a group; and in its structure it is balanced, in the most delicate and unstable equilibrium, between two great personages,—Hamlet and the King (Claudius). It is a duel to the death between well-matched antagonists; so well-matched, indeed, that neither triumphs, but they destroy each other in the end. Almost everything that has been written about this drama is out of focus. For Claudius is either belittled or disregarded. . . . Shakespeare's Claudius is superbly royal. . . . Here is indeed a born ruler of men."⁷

—GEORGE LYMAN KITTREDGE.

The careful reader of *Hamlet* cannot fail to notice that up to the climax of the drama, Hamlet is on the offensive, and Claudius the defensive; but that when Claudius finally grasps the situation, he it is who at once assumes the aggressive, and Hamlet is put on the defensive until his final hour of life.

IX. POLONIUS

"Polonius is a man bred in courts, exercised in business, stored with observation, confident in his knowledge, proud of his eloquence; all declining into dotage. His mode of oratory is designed to ridicule the practice of those times, of prefaces that made no introduction, and of method that embarrassed rather than explained. This part of his character is accidental, the rest natural.

⁷ The student should not fail to read this penetrating and profoundly sensible essay, *Shakspeare*, by G. L. Kittredge, Harvard University Press, 1916.

. . . The idea of dotage encroaching upon wisdom will solve all the phenomena of the character of Polonius."

—JOHNSON: *General Observations on Shakespeare's Plays*.

"In this web of crisscross tragic entanglements Polonius is meshed—Polonius, benevolent diplomatist and devoted father—and with him the son and daughter whom he loves with the pathetic tenderness of an old and failing man, and who return his affection as it deserves."

—GEORGE LYMAN KITTREDGE: *Shakspeare*.

X. GERTRUDE

"First we may say that the Queen is the original cause of the crime; by allowing herself to receive the unlawful attentions of Claudius, she drops into his mind the seeds of temptation, which result in the murder of her husband. As the primal cause was in her, so she is the first to fall, and from the cup poisoned by the hand of the murderer for her son to drink."

—MARY E. FERRIS-GETTEMY: *Outline Studies in the Shakespearian Drama*.

"Almost any other author would have depicted Gertrude without a single alleviating trait in her character. Beaumont and Fletcher would probably have made her simply frightful or loathsome, and capable only of exciting abhorrence or disgust; if, indeed, in her monstrous depravity she had not rather failed to excite any feeling. Shakespeare, with far more effect, as well as far more truth, exhibits her with such a mixture of good and bad, as neither disarms censure or precludes pity. Herself dragged along in the terrible train of consequences which her own guilt had a hand in starting, she is hurried away into the same dreadful abyss with those whom she loves, and against whom she has sinned."

—HENRY N. HUDSON: *The Works of Shakespeare*.

XI. OPHELIA

"Ophelia," says Masfield, "is a doll without intellect." "O, far too soft, too good, too fair, to be cast among the briars of this working day world, and fall and bleed on the thorns of life!" asserts Mrs. Jameson's somewhat saccharine and conventional treatise on *The Characteristics of Shakespeare's Women*. Ophelia is, by sheer force of circumstances, the clinging vine type of girlhood. Motherless, immature, innocent, helpless, she is drawn inevitably into the dark whirlpool of conflicting forces about her and is destroyed by them.

XII. LAERTES

Hamlet and Laertes are deliberately parallelized by the master dramatist to throw the character of Hamlet into sharp relief. Both exhibit a common purpose: to revenge a father's death. The critics of the old school often contrast the two, the one personifying inaction, the other, action. This sort of criticism is both false and misleading. If Hamlet is to be condemned, why then is not Laertes to be highly praised? Masfield calls Laertes a boor. Certainly his character is impulsive, rash, and hot-headed. His language to Claudius in IV-5-11. 111-117, betrays a reckless, profane mind which has no ability to make moral discriminations. In their respective attitudes toward the problems, responsibilities, and issues of life it is, then, that the two characters are foils,—the difference between the superficial and the profound mind.

XIII. HORATIO

It is difficult to praise justly the character of Hamlet's well-beloved schoolfellow, Horatio. Verplanck

speaks of "the great beauty of Horatio's character, and its exquisite adaptation to the effect of the piece," and goes on truly to say that it is only "sketched, not elaborately painted." He does not become the center of a secondary plot; it requires a special effort of the mind to separate him for critical analysis and admiration. Shakespeare is fond of portraying deep and abiding friendship. This, in fact, becomes his theme in *The Merchant of Venice*. What Bassanio was to Antonio, Jonathan to David, Pythias to Damon, Horatio is to Hamlet. Probably every normal person in the world has some intimate friend to share his doubts and perplexities, joys and fears. We are all Hamlets and Horatios. It is Horatio's final function to clear the mind of Denmark as to the tragic complications by reporting Hamlet and his cause aright "to the unsatisfied." (V-2-ll. 328-329.)

XIV. ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, like Polonius, Ophelia, and Laertes are merely the "gross human probes" used cleverly by Claudius to discover if Hamlet's madness is genuine. In this capacity they come to grief, through the intellectual superiority of Hamlet. Hamlet, assisted by Horatio, returns the compliment by "searching the King's mind with the finest of intellectual probes" (Masefield),—a play to determine his guilt. Hamlet fights single-handed, but ever with a faith in "the Divinity that shapes our ends," which sent the Ghost back to this world, which sent the players to Elsinore, which caused Hamlet to board a pirate ship, and which guided his hand in the final scene, but not without exacting the penalty for past delays.

XV. FORTINBRAS

Fortinbras, in addition to Laertes, is a foil used by Shakespeare to set out boldly the character of Hamlet.

Again we have a parallel motive: Hamlet's father had slain the father of Fortinbras, and forcibly seized a strip of Norway. This figures but remotely in the issues of the drama, however. Says Masefield: "Fortinbras, bright and noble, marching to the drum to win a dunghill, gives a colour to the folly." Fortinbras is the active soldier and "statesman," who marches at the head of an army to avenge a trifle. Hamlet recognizes in his foil the characteristics apparently lacking in himself, and at the conclusion of the drama gives his blessing to the man who lived for worldly empire and succeeded in the sphere of the material; but who, unlike himself, recognized not the existence of that empire of spirit wherein life's ultimate issues can alone be met and vanquished.

XVI. CONCLUSION

Hamlet is a tragedy of thought, like *Don Quixote*, as Brandes suggests. "The scenes are interchangeable, diversified with solemnity and merriment." Eternal issues are set into bold contrast with ideas purely of mockery and levity. Death is jested at, yet treated with profound regard. In this respect *Hamlet* is life oriented. Victor Hugo said of Hamlet:

"His name is as a name on a wood-cut of Albert Dürer's 'Melancholia.' The bat flies over Hamlet's head; at his feet sit Knowledge with a globe and compass, and Love with an hour-glass; while behind him, on the horizon, rests a giant sun, which only serves to make the sky above him darker."

THE PLAY

CAST OF CHARACTERS

<i>Claudius</i> , King of Denmark.	<i>Marcellus</i> ,	} Officers.
	<i>Bernardo</i> ,	
<i>Hamlet</i> , son to the late, and nephew to the present King.	<i>Francisco</i> , a soldier.	
<i>Polonius</i> , Prime Minister.	<i>Reynaldo</i> , servant of Polonius.	
<i>Horatio</i> , friend of Hamlet.	<i>Players</i> .	
<i>Laertes</i> , son of Polonius.	<i>Two Clowns</i> , grave-diggers.	
<i>Voltimand</i> ,	<i>Fortinbras</i> , prince of Norway.	
<i>Cornelius</i> ,	<i>A Captain</i> .	
<i>Rosencrantz</i> ,	<i>English Ambassadors</i> .	
<i>Guildestern</i> ,	<i>Gertrude</i> , Queen of Denmark, and mother of Hamlet.	
<i>Osric</i> ,	<i>Ophelia</i> , daughter of Polonius.	
<i>A Gentleman</i> ,		
<i>A Priest</i> .		

Lords, Ladies, Officers, Soldiers, Sailors,
Messengers, and other Attendants.
Ghost of Hamlet's Father.
Scene: Elsinore, Denmark.

THE MODERN READER'S *HAMLET*

ACT I

*Scene 1. Elsinore. A platform before the castle.
Francisco at his post. Enter Bernardo.*

Bernardo. Who's there?

Francisco. Nay, answer *me*; stand, and reveal your identity.

Bernardo. Long live the king!

Francisco. Bernardo?

Bernardo. It is he.

Francisco. You come most promptly upon your hour.

Bernardo. It has just struck twelve; get you to bed,
Francisco.

Francisco. For this relief much thanks; it is bitter cold;

And I am sick at heart.

Bernardo. Have you had a quiet guard?

Francisco. Not a mouse stirring.

Bernardo. Well, good night.

If you meet Horatio and Marcellus,
The sharers of my watch, bid them make haste.

Francisco. I think I hear them.—Stand, ho! Who is there?

Enter Horatio and Marcellus

Horatio. Friends to this ground.

Marcellus. And loyal subjects of the Dane.

Francisco. I bid you good night, and God be with you.

Marcellus. O, farewell, honest soldier;

Who has relieved you?

Francisco. Bernardo has my place.

Good night, and God be with you. *(Exit)*

Marcellus. Holla! Bernardo!

Bernardo. Say,—

What, is Horatio there?

Horatio. A piece of him.

Bernardo. Welcome, Horatio;—welcome, good Marcellus.

Marcellus. What, has this thing appeared again to-night?

Bernardo. I have seen nothing.

Marcellus. Horatio says it is but our imagination,

And will not admit it to his own belief

Concerning this dread sight, twice seen by us;

Therefore I have entreated him to come

With us to watch the minutes of this night,

So that if again this apparition should come,

He may confirm our eyes and speak to it.

Horatio. Tush, tush, it will not appear.

Bernardo. Sit down awhile;

And let us once again assail¹ your ears,

That are so fortified² against our story,

As to what we have seen the past two nights.

Horatio. Well, suppose we sit down,

And let us hear Bernardo speak of this.

Bernardo. Last night of all,

When that same star yonder that's westward from the pole-star

Had made his course to illuminate that part of heaven

Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,

The bell then striking one,—

^{1,2} Bernardo, being a professional soldier, is made by Shakespeare to use the lingo of his profession.

Enter Ghost

Marcellus. Peace, break thou off; look, there it comes again!

Bernardo. In the same figure, like the king that's dead.

Marcellus. Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.

Bernardo. Does it not look like the king? mark it, Horatio.

Horatio. Most like him; it harasses me with fear and wonder.

Bernardo. It wishes to be spoken to.

Marcellus. Speak to it, Horatio.

Horatio. What art thou that thus invades the night,
Usurping that fair and warlike form

In which our buried majesty of Denmark

Formerly did march? by heaven, I charge thee, speak!

Marcellus. It is offended.

Bernardo. See, it stalks away!

Horatio. Stay! speak, speak! I charge thee, speak!

(Exit Ghost).

Marcellus. 'Tis gone, and will not answer.

Bernardo. How now, Horatio! you tremble and look pale;

Is not this something more than fantasy?

What do you think of it?

Horatio. Before my God, I could not believe this
Without the sense-informing and true confirmation
Of my own eyes.

Marcellus. Is it not like the king?

Horatio. As you are like your own self:

Such was the very armour he had on

When he the ambitious king of Norway combated;

So frowned he once, when in angry parley

He smote the sledged Poles on the ice.

'Tis strange.

Marcellus. Thus twice before, and just at this dead hour,

With military walk has he gone by our watch.

Horatio. What particular line of thought to follow I know not;

But, speaking in a general way, my opinion is That this forebodes some strange upheaval in our state.

Marcellus. Come now, sit down, and tell me, he who knows,

Why this same strict and most observant watch Causes nightly so to toil the subjects of the land, And why such daily casting of brazen cannon, And foreign marketing for implements of war; Why such impressment of shipbuilders, whose heavy task

Does not distinguish Sunday from the week-day.

What can be imminent, that this sweaty haste Makes night fellow-labourer with the day?

Who can inform me?

Horatio. I can do that;

At least, so the whisper goes. Our last king, Whose image just even now appeared to us, Was, as you know, by Fortinbras of Norway, Spurred thereto by a most emulative pride, Challenged to a final combat; in which our valiant Hamlet,—

For so this side of the known world considered him,—

Slew Fortinbras; who, by a sealed covenant, Well ratified by the uses of law and heraldry, Forfeited, along with his life, all those lands Which he stood possessed of, to the conqueror: Against the which a portion of equal value Was staked by our king; which would have been returned

To the inheritance of Fortinbras,

Had he been vanquisher ; likewise, by the same covenant
And purport of the document as drawn up,
His would fall to Hamlet. Now, sir, young Fortinbras,
Of untempered spirit hot and full,
Has in the outskirts of Norway here and there
Mustered indiscriminately a band of desperadoes,
For no pay but their keep, to some undertaking
Involving stubborn courage ; which is no other,—
As plainly is apparent to our government,—
Except to recover from us, by strong hand
And forcible terms, those aforesaid lands
So by his father lost : and this, I take it,
Is the main motive of our preparations,
The source of this our watch, and the chief reason
For this post-haste and turmoil in the land.

Bernardo. I think it may be no other than just so.
Well may it suit your theory that this ominous figure
Comes armed through our watch, so like the king
That was and is the cause of these wars.

Horatio. A small particle it is to trouble the mind's
eye.

In the highest and most flourishing state of Rome,
A little before the most mighty Julius fell,
The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead
Squeaked and gibbered in the streets of Rome :
(And there were other fearful sights)
Such as comets and dews of blood,
Evil influences in the sun ; and the moon,
The governess of the ocean tides,
Was darkened like at judgment day with eclipse :
And likewise similar portents of terrible events,
Like messengers always preceding the fates,
And the prologue to the calamity coming on,
Heaven and earth have together demonstrated
To these regions and our countrymen.

Re-enter Ghost

But, soft, behold! look, here it comes again!
 I'll cross its path even though it blight me. Stay, illusion!

If thou canst make a sound or use thy voice,
 Speak to me;
 If there can any good thing be done,
 That may bring ease to thee and grace to me,
 Speak to me;
 If thou art admitted to secret information concerning
 thy country's fate,
 Which lucky foreknowledge may help to avoid,
 O, speak!
 Or if thou hast hoarded up in thy life
 Unjustly wrung treasure in the depths of earth,
 For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,

(*The cock crows*).

Speak of it; stay, and speak! Stop it, Marcellus!

Marcellus. Shall I strike at it with my spear?

Horatio. Do, if it will not stand.

Bernardo. 'Tis here!

Horatio. 'Tis here!

Marcellus. 'Tis gone!

We do it wrong, being so majestic,
 To make toward it a show of violence;
 For it is, as the air, invulnerable,
 And our vain blows malicious mockery.

Bernardo. It was about to speak when the cock
 crowed.

Horatio. And then it started like a guilty thing
 At a startling summons. I have heard,
 The cock, that is trumpeter to the morning,
 With his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
 Awakens the god of day; and at his warning,
 Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,

The roaming and wandering spirit hastens
To its place of confinement : and of the truth of this,
This present object afforded proof.

Marcellus. It faded at the crowing of the cock.
Some say, that always when that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawn crows all night long ;
And then, they say, no spirit can walk abroad ;
The nights are wholesome ; then no planets smite,
No fairy enchants, nor witch has power to charm ;
So sacred and so blessed is the time.

Horatio. So I have heard, and do, in part, believe it.
But, look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
Walks over the dew of yon high eastern hill.
Let us conclude our watch ; and, by my advice,
Let us impart what we have seen tonight
To young Hamlet ; for, upon my life,
This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.
Do you consent that we acquaint him with it,
Necessary since we love him, and corresponding with
our duty ?

Marcellus. Let's do it, pray ; and I know this morning
The place convenient to us all where we shall find him.

Scene 2. A Room of State in the Castle.

*Flourish. Enter the King, Queen, Hamlet, Polonius,
Laertes, Voltimand, Cornelius, Lords, and
Attendants.*

King. Though of our dear brother Hamlet's death
The memory be green, and though it befitted us
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
To be united in a single expression of woe,
Yet discretion has thus far fought with natural feeling,
That we with sorrow together think of him,

But wisely with remembrance of ourselves.
Therefore our former sister-in-law, now our queen,
The imperial joint-possessor of this warlike state,
We have, as it were with a frustrated joy,—
With one eye cheerful and one sorrowful,
With mirth in funeral and dirge in marriage,
In balanced scales weighing delight and dolefulness,—

Taken as wife; nor in this have we excluded
Your own best judgments, which have fully approved
The course of this affair. For all, you have our thanks.
Now follows what you already know: young
Fortinbras,

Holding a poor opinion of our strength,
Or thinking because of our late dear brother's death
Our state to be disjointed and disordered,
Added to the illusion of his superiority,
Has not failed to pester us with messages
Referring to the surrender of those lands
Which his father legally lost
To our most valiant brother. So much for him.
Now for ourselves and for this time of meeting.
Thus much the business is: we have written here
To the king of Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras,—

Who, powerless and bed-ridden, hardly hears
Of this purpose of his nephew's,—to check
His further progress therein; inasmuch as the money
levies,

The enlistment of men, and complete quotas, are made
wholly

From among his subjects; and we here dispatch
You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltimand,
As bearers of this greeting to the old Norwegian king;
Giving you no further personal power
To negotiate with the king, than the extent

Of these detailed articles may allow.

Farewell, and let your speed evince your dutifulness.

Cornelius. } In that and in all else shall we show our
Voltimand. } dutifulness.

King. We doubt it not at all; heartily farewell.

(Exeunt Voltimand and Cornelius.)

And now, Laertes, what's the news with you?

You told us of some petition; what is it, Laertes?

You cannot speak with reason to the chief Dane,

And ask in vain; what wouldst thou beg, Laertes,

That I should not be glad to offer, let alone thy asking?

The head is not more closely related to the heart,

The hand more necessary to the mouth,

Than the throne of Denmark is to thy father.

What wouldst thou have, Laertes?

Laertes. My dread lord, your kind leave to return to
France;

Whence, although I came willingly to Denmark,

To show my duty in being present at your coronation,

Yet now, I must confess, that duty done,

My thoughts and wishes revert again to France,

And I bow them to your kind leave and permission.

King. Have you your father's leave? What says
Polonius?

Polonius. He hath, my lord, wrested from me slowly
my permission

By elaborate petition, and finally

I placed the seal of my difficult-won consent;

I do beseech you, give him leave to go.

King. Seize your most favourable opportunity,

Laertes; may time be your own,

And your best graces help you spend it as you will!

But now, my nephew Hamlet, and my son,—

Hamlet. (Aside) A little more than kindred, and
less than human-kind.

King. How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

Hamlet. Not so, my lord; rather, I am too much in the sun.

Queen. Good Hamlet, cast thy mourning colour off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.

Do not forever with thy lowered eyelids

Seek for thy noble father in the dust.

Thou know'st 'tis a common thing; everything that
lives must die,

Passing through existence in nature to eternity.

Hamlet. Yes, madam, it is common.

Queen. If it be common,

Why seems it so particular with thee?

Hamlet. Seems, madam! nay, it is; I know not
'seems.'

'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,

Nor habitually worn suits of sombre black,

Nor the breaking forth of heavy sighs,

No, nor the abundant flow of streaming tears,

Nor the downcast expression of the countenance,

Together with all the forms, moods, and displays of
grief,

That can set me forth truly; these indeed seem,

For they are actions a man might feign:

But I have that sorrow which surpasseth show;

These but the external evidences of woe.

King. 'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature,
Hamlet,

To render these mourning duties to your father:

But, as you know, your father also lost a father,

That lost father lost his: and of course the survivor
was bound,

In filial obligation, for some time

To funereal sorrow: but to persist

Obstinately in mourning is a course

Of impious stubbornness; it is unmanly grief;

It shows a will most unsubmissive to heaven,

A heart unfortified, a mind without patience,
An understanding foolish and undisciplined:
For that which we know is inevitable and is as common
As anything which is most ordinarily perceived,
Why should we in our peevish opposition
So take it to heart? Fie! 'tis a fault before heaven,
A fault against the dead themselves, a fault before
nature,
To the faculty of reason most absurd, which has for
a common theme,
The death of fathers, and which has ever cried
From the first death to that which has just occurred,
'This needs must be.' We pray you, cast aside
This unavailing grief, and think of me
As your own father; for, let the world take note,
You are next in succession to the throne,
And with no less distinguished degree of love
Than that which dearest father bears toward his son
Do I impart love to you. As to your intention
Of going back to school in Wittenberg,
It is most contrary to our desires;
And we beseech you, incline yourself to remain
Here in the cheer and comfort of our presence,
As our chiefest courtier, kinsman, and son.
Queen. Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet:
I pray thee, stay with us; go not to Wittenberg.
Hamlet. I shall obey you to the utmost, madam.
King. Why, 'tis a loving and an excellent reply;
Be like ourself in Denmark. Madam, come;
This courteous and voluntary acquiescence of Hamlet
Warms my heart: in proof of which,
No riotous health that the king drinks today,
But shall be told by cannon salute to the clouds,
So that the king's bumper the heavens shall noise
abroad,
Re-echoing earthly thunder. Come away.
(*Flourish. Exeunt all but Hamlet.*)

Hamlet. O, that this too, too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and dissolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not sealed
His authority against self-slaughter! O God! O God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the customs of this world!
Fie on 't! O fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows up to seed; things rank and coarse in nature
Possess it entirely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead! No, not so much, not two;
So excellent a king; that was, compared to this one,
As Hyperion is like a satyr; so loving to my mother
That he could not permit the winds of heaven
To visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? why she would cling to him
As though her affection constantly increased
By inseparable companionship; and yet, within a
month,—

Let me not think of it,—Frailty, thy name is
woman!—

A little month, or before those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all in tears,—why, she, even she,—
O God! a beast, without the power of reason,
Would have mourned longer,—married my uncle,
My father's brother; but no more like my father
Than I am like to Hercules. Within a month,
Before the salt of hypocritical tears
Had ceased their gushing in her inflamed eyes,
She married. O, most wicked speed, to haste
With such celerity to incestuous sheets!
It is not nor it cannot come to good:
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue!

(Enter Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo)

Horatio. Hail to your lordship!

Hamlet. I am glad to see you well:
Horatio!—I am forgetting myself.

Horatio. Even the same, my lord, and your poor servant as ever.

Hamlet. Sir, you are my good friend; I'll exchange that name with you:

And what are you doing away from Wittenberg, Horatio?—

Marcellus?

Marcellus. My good lord,—

Hamlet. I am very glad to see you. (*To Bernardo.*)
Good even, sir.

But what, in faith, are you doing away from Wittenberg?

Horatio. Developing a truant disposition, my good lord.

Hamlet. I would not hear your enemy say so;
Nor shall you do my ear such violence,
To make it a believer of your own report
Against yourself; I know well that you are no truant.
But what is your business in Elsinore?

We'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart.

Horatio. My lord, I came to attend your father's funeral.

Hamlet. I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow-student;
I think it was to see my mother's wedding.

Horatio. Indeed, my lord, it followed soon after.

Hamlet. Thrift! thrift! Horatio,—the funeral-baked meats

Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.

Would I had met my most heartfelt foe in heaven

Than to have lived to see that day, Horatio!

My father,—I think I see my father.

Horatio. O where, my lord?

Hamlet. In my mind's eye, Horatio.

Horatio. I saw him,—once; he was a goodly king.

Hamlet. He was a man; take him for all in all,
I shall not look upon his like again.

Horatio. My lord, I think I saw him last night.

Hamlet. Saw? whom?

Horatio. My lord, the king your father.

Hamlet. The king my father!

Horatio. Control your amazement for awhile

With an attentive ear until I can report,

With the corroboration of these gentlemen,

This marvelous thing to you.

Hamlet. For God's love, let me hear.

Horatio. For two nights together had these gentlemen,

Marcellus and Bernardo, during their watch,

Amid the dead vacancy of the night,

Been thus encountered. A figure like your father,

Armed completely and exactly from head to foot,

Appears before them, and with solemn march,

Slow and stately, goes before them; three times thus

Before their oppressed and fearful eyes,

Within his short staff's length; while they, melted

Almost to jelly by the effect of fear,

Stand dumb, and speak not to him. This to me

In awe-struck secrecy they did impart;

And I with them the third night kept the watch:

Where, just as they had reported, both as to time,

And as to the form of the thing, each word sustained
by fact,

The apparition comes. I knew your father;

These hands are not more alike.

Hamlet. But where was this?

Marcellus. My lord, upon the platform where we
watched.

Hamlet. Did you not speak to it?

Horatio. My lord, I did;

But answer made it none; yet once I thought

It lifted up its head and did address

Itself to motion, as though it would speak;

But just then the morning cock crowed loudly,

And at the sound it shrank in haste away,

And vanished from our sight.

Hamlet.

It is very strange.

Horatio. As I do live, my honoured lord, it is true;

And we thought it obligatory in our duty

To let you know of it.

Hamlet. Indeed, indeed, sirs, but this troubles me.

Hold you the watch tonight?

Marcellus.

Bernardo. } We do, my lord.

Hamlet. Was it armed, did you say?

Marcellus.

Bernardo. } Armed, my lord.

Hamlet. From top to toe?

Marcellus.

Bernardo. } My lord, from head to foot.

Hamlet. Then saw you not his face?

Horatio. O, yes, my lord; he wore his beaver up.

Hamlet. What, did he look frowningly?

Horatio. A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.

Hamlet. Pale, or red?

Horatio. Nay, very pale.

Hamlet. And fixed his eyes on you?

Horatio. Most constantly.

Hamlet.

I wish I had been there.

Horatio. It would have amazed you much.

Hamlet. Very likely, very likely. Stayed it long?

Horatio. While one with moderate speed might count
a hundred.

Marcellus.

Bernardo. } Longer, longer.

Horatio. Not when I saw it.

Hamlet.

His beard was grizzled? No?

Horatio. It was, as I have seen it in his life,

Dark, streaked with grey.

Hamlet. I will watch tonight.

Perhaps it will walk again.

Horatio.

I warrant you it will.

Hamlet. If it assume my noble father's person,
I'll speak to it, though hell itself should open
And bid me hold my tongue. I beseech you all,
If you have hitherto concealed this sight,
Keep it retained in your silence still;
And whatsoever else shall happen tonight,
Observe it, but do not mention it.
I will repay your friendship. So, farewell;
Upon the platform, between eleven and twelve,
I'll visit you.

All. Our duty to your honor.

Hamlet. Your regards to me, as mine to you; farewell.

(Exeunt Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo.)

Hamlet. My father's spirit,—in arms! All is not well;

I suspect some foul play: I wish the night were come!
Till then sit still, my soul. Foul deeds will rise,
Though all the earth overwhelm them, to men's eyes.
(Exit)

*Scene 3. A room in Polonius's house.
Enter Laertes and Ophelia.*

Laertes. My necessities are embarked; farewell.
And, sister, according as the winds are favourable
And the means of conveyance, also, do not be neglectful,

But let me hear from you.

Ophelia. Do you doubt that?

Laertes. As for Hamlet, and the trifling of his favour,
Consider it but a whim and an impulse of youth,—
A transient violet in the springtime of youth,—
Premature, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,
Perfume for the gratification of the moment;
Not more.

Ophelia. No more than that?

Laertes. Consider it no more;

For nature, when growing, grows not alone
In sinews and physical bulk, but, as the body increases,
The judgment of the mind and soul
Grows in proportion. Perhaps he loves you now;
And now no stain or deceit besmirches
The virtue of his intentions; but you must fear,
Taking his high rank into consideration, his will is not
his own;

For he himself is subject to the dignity of his position.
He may not, as unpedigreed persons do,
Choose for himself, for on his choice depends
The safety and welfare of all Denmark;
And therefore must his choice be subject
To the vote and consent of that body politic
Whereof he is the head. Then, if he says he loves you,
It befits your wisdom to believe it
Only so far as he in his peculiar situation
May be able to execute his promises; which is no
further

Than the main voice of Denmark lends approval.
Then weigh well what loss your honour may sustain,
If with too confiding ear you listen to his songs,
Or lose your heart, or lay your chastity open
To his unbridled solicitation.

Fear it, *Ophelia*, fear it, my dear sister,
And stay in the rear of your affection,
Out of the range and danger of desire.
The most scrupulous maid is prodigal enough
When she but unmask her beauty to the moon.
Virtue itself escapes not slanderous strokes;
The canker blights the tender plants of spring,
Too often before their buds be opened;
And in the morn and liquid dew of youth
Destructive blights are then most imminent.
Be wary, then; the best safety lies in fear:

Youth rebels against itself, though no tempter be near.

Ophelia. I shall the substance of this good lesson keep,
As a watchman to my heart. But, my dear brother,
Do not, as some graceless pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,
While like a puffed and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of indulgence treads,
And takes not his own advice.

Laertes. O, fear not for me.

Enter Polonius

I tarry too long; but here my father comes.

A second farewell blessing is a second favour;

Opportunity now provides this.

Polonius. Still here, Laertes? aboard, aboard, for
shame!

The wind blows steadily against your sail,

And you are causing delay. There; my blessing with
you!

(Laying his hand on Laertes's head)

And these few precepts see that you inscribe

Upon your memory. Give your thoughts no voice,

Nor any inappropriate thought hasty execution.

Be friendly, but by no means common.

The friends you have, tested by experience,

Grapple them to your soul with hoops of steel;

But do not dull your handshake by freely welcoming

Every new-made, untried comrade. Beware

Of starting a quarrel; but, once being in,

Conduct yourself that your opponent shall beware.

Give every man your ear, but few your voice;

Receive every man's opinion, but reserve final judgment.

Costly your dress as your purse can buy,

Fine in quality but not of gaudy pattern;

For the apparel oft proclaims the man;

And in France those of the best rank and station

Especially are particular and well-bred in this.
Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
For a loan often loses both itself and the friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of economy.
This above all: be true to your own self first,
And it will follow as the night the day,
That you never then can be false to any man.
Farewell; my blessing influence all this in you.
Laertes. Most humbly I do take my leave, my lord.
Polonius. The time invites; go, your servants wait.
Laertes. Farewell, Ophelia; and remember well
What I have said to you.
Ophelia. It is in my memory locked,
And you yourself shall hold the key of it.
Laertes. Farewell.

(Exit)

Polonius. What is it, Ophelia, that he has said to you?

Ophelia. If you please, something concerning Lord Hamlet.

Polonius. By the Virgin,—very timely.
It is reported to me he has very oft of late
Given you much time privately, and that you yourself
Have of your audience been most free and bounteous.
If it be true,—and so it is told to me,
And that by way of warning,—I must tell you,
You do not understand your situation as clearly
As it behooves my daughter and your honour.
What is going on between you two? tell me the truth.

Ophelia. He has, my lord, lately made many tenders
Of affection toward me.

Polonius. Affection! pooh! you speak like a green girl.
Inexperienced amid such perilous circumstances.
Do you believe his—tenders, as you call them?

Ophelia. I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

Polonius. By the Virgin, then I'll teach you; think
yourself a baby,

That you have taken these tenders for true pay,
Which are not sterling. Tender yourself less cheaply;
Or—not to override the poor proverb
By running it thus,—you'll tender me a fool.

Ophelia. My lord, he has urged his love upon me
In an honourable fashion.

Polonius. Yes, fashion you may call it; go to, go to.

Ophelia. And has given the appearance of reality to
his language

With almost all the holy vows of heaven.

Polonius. Yes, snares to catch simpletons. I know
myself,

When the blood burns, how extravagantly the soul
Lends vows to the tongue; these flashes, daughter,
Emitting more light than heat, containing neither
As they seem to promise while leaping up,
You must not take for flames. From this time,
daughter,

Be somewhat scanter of your maiden presence;

Set your interviews at a higher rate

Than a mere demand for a hearing. As for Lord
Hamlet,

Believe this much about him: he is young,

And with a larger tether may he walk

Than may be given to you. In short, Ophelia,

Do not believe his vows; for they are procurers,

Not of that true colour which their garments suggest,

But mere implorers of unholy suits,

Sounding like sanctified and pious bonds,

The better to deceive. This once for all:

I do not want, in plain terms, from this time forth

You to misuse any leisure moment

In having words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.

Look to it, I charge you; come along.

Ophelia. I shall obey, my lord.

(*Exeunt*)

*Scene 4. The platform.**Enter Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus.**Hamlet.* The air bites keenly; it is very cold.*Horatio.* It is a sharp and penetrating air.*Hamlet.* What is the hour?*Horatio.* I think it not quite twelve.*Marcellus.* No, it has struck.*Horatio.* Indeed? I heard it not; then the time draws
near

Wherein the spirit is accustomed to walk.

(A flourish of trumpets, and ordnance shot off, within.)

What does this mean, my lord?

Hamlet. The king sits late tonight, and takes his
draught,

Holds carousal, and through the up-spring reels;

And, as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,

The kettle-drum and trumpet bellow forth

The triumphant reception of his pledge.

Horatio. Is it a custom?*Hamlet.* Yes, by the Virgin, it is;

But to my mind, though I am native here

And to the customs born, this is a custom

More honoured in the breaking than in the keeping.

This heavy-headed revel makes us everywhere

Censured and slandered by other nations:

They call us drunkards and likewise swine,

Thus tarnishing our honour; and indeed it detracts

From our achievements, though performed with highest
distinction,

The very pith and marrow of our reputation.

Likewise, it often happens with individual men,

That for some vicious constitutional blemish,

As, in their birth,—and here they are not guilty,

Since nature cannot choose its origin,—
By an excess of some constitutional tendency,
Often breaking through the fences and forts of reason;
Or by some natural habit that too much overcomes
The outward form of pleasing manners, that these men,
Carrying, I say, the deep impress of one defect,
Being an inborn defect, or else accidental,—
Their virtues otherwise,—be they as pure as grace,
Infinite as man's nature may partake of,—
Are sure nevertheless in the general opinion to be deeply
 tainted
From that one particular fault; the dram of evil
All the preponderant nobleness cancels
And brings into ill-repute.

Enter Ghost.

Horatio. Look, my lord, it comes!
Hamlet. Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
Be thou a saved soul or a spirit lost;
Bring with thee zephyrs from heaven or blasts from
 hell;
Be thy intents wicked or charitable;
Thou com'st in such an inquiring shape
That I will speak to thee: I'll call thee Hamlet,
King, father, royal Dane; O, answer me!
Let me not burst in ignorance; but tell
Why thy consecrated bones, hearsed in death,
Have burst their shroud; why the sepulchre,
Wherein we saw thee quietly interred,
Hath opened his ponderous and marble jaws,
To cast thee up again! What can this mean,
That thou, dead corpse, again in complete armour,
Revisit'st thus the glimmering of the moon,
Making night hideous; and we, limited in natural
 understanding,

So to stagger in our comprehension
With thoughts beyond our abilities to grasp?
Say, why is this? wherefore? what ought we to do?

Horatio. It beckons you to go away with it,
As if it did desire to make some communication
To you alone.

Marcellus. Look, with what courteous action
It waves you to more distant ground;
But do not go with it.

Horatio. No, by no means.

Hamlet. It will not speak; then I will follow it.

Horatio. Do not, my lord.

Hamlet. Why, what should be the fear?

I do not set my life at a pin's value;
And, as for my soul, what can it do to that,
Being immortal like itself?

It waves further again; I'll follow it.

Horatio. What if it tempt you toward the flood, my
lord,

Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles over its base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form,
Which might deprive your reason of its sovereignty
And draw you into madness? think not of it;
The very place puts desperate fancies
Without any other motive, into every brain
That looks down many fathoms to the sea
And hears it roar beneath.

Hamlet. It beckons me still.

Go on, I'll follow thee.

Marcellus. You shall not go, my lord.

Hamlet. Hold off your hands!

Horatio. Be ruled; you shall not go.

Hamlet. My fate cries out,
And makes each petty sinew in this body
As hard as the Nemean lion's muscle.

Still am I called. Unhand me, gentlemen;
By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him who hinders me!
I say, away! Go on; I'll follow thee!

(Exeunt Ghost and Hamlet)

Horatio. He grows desperate with fancy.

Marcellus. Let's follow; it is not proper to obey him
thus.

Horatio. Let's after him. What will be the issue of
this?

Marcellus. Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

Horatio. Heaven will direct the issue.

Marcellus. Rather, let us follow him.

Scene 5. Another part of the platform.

Enter Ghost and Hamlet.

Hamlet. Where wilt thou lead me? speak; I'll go no
further.

Ghost. Mark my words.

Hamlet. I will.

Ghost. My hour is almost here,
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames
Must give myself back.

Hamlet. Alas, poor ghost!

Ghost. Pity me not, but give serious attention
To what I am about to reveal.

Hamlet. Speak; I am ready to hear.

Ghost. So will you be to revenge, when you have
heard.

Hamlet. What?

Ghost. I am your father's spirit,
Doomed for a limited time to walk at night,
And during the day confined to fasting in fires,

Until the foul offenses committed in my natural life
Are burned and purged away. But for the fact I am
forbidden

To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
I could a tale unfold the slightest word of which
Would harrow up your soul, freeze your youthful
blood,

Make your two eyes start out of their sockets,
Your tangled locks to part,
And each individual hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine;
But this revelation of eternity must not be
To ears of flesh and blood. Listen, O listen!
If ever you did your dear father love——

Hamlet. O God!

Ghost. Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

Hamlet. Murder!

Ghost. Murder most foul, the best that may be said;
But this of all most foul, strange, and unnatural.

Hamlet. Hasten to inform me, that I, with wings as
swift

As meditation or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge.

Ghost. I find thee quick to respond;
Yet duller wouldst thou be than the sense-dulling weed
That roots itself in idleness on Lethe's banks,
Wert thou unwilling to stir in this affair. Now, Ham-
let, hear,

It has been circulated that I, while sleeping in my
garden,
Was bitten by a snake; and thus the ear of all Denmark
Is by a false official bulletin of my death
Rankly deceived; but know, thou noble youth,
The snake that stung thy father's life away
Now wears his crown.

Hamlet. O my prophetic soul!
My uncle!

Ghost. Yes, that incestuous and adulterous beast,
By the witchcraft of his cunning, with treacherous
gifts—

O wicked craft and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce!—won to his shameful lust
The will of my apparently virtuous queen.
O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there! (*deterioration*)
From me, whose love of lofty dignity
Was a fulfilment of the vow
Which I made to her in marriage; and to sink
Down to the level of a wretch, whose natural gifts
were poor

Compared to mine!

But just as virtue, ever incorruptible
Though lewdness court it in a heavenly form,
So lust, though to a radiant angel linked,
Will both satiate itself in a celestial bed
And prey on garbage.
But, soft! I scent the morning air;
I must be brief. Sleeping within the garden,
My custom always in the afternoon,
Upon my unguarded hour your uncle stole,
With the juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the openings of my ears did pour
The leprous distillation, the effect of which
Holds such antagonism to human blood
That swift as quicksilver it courses through
The natural cavities and canals of the body;
And with sudden power it coagulates
And curdles, like acid drops in milk,
The thin and healthful blood; so did it mine;
And an instantaneous eruption covered like bark,
In a leprous fashion, with a vile and loathsome crust,
All my smooth body.
Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once bereft;

Cut off before my sins had borne just fruitage,
Without communion, preparation, or extreme unction;
No reckoning made, but sent to my accounting
With all my imperfections on my head.

Hamlet. O, horrible! O, horrible! most horrible!

Ghost. If you have natural feeling, do not endure it;
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch of lust and damned incest.

But, in whatever manner you proceed,
Taint not your mind, nor let your soul contrive
Anything against your mother; leave her to heaven,
And to those thorns that lodge in her bosom
To pain and sting her. Farewell at once!

The glow-worm shows the morning to be near,
And begins to pale its ineffective light.

Adieu, adieu, adieu! remember me. *(Exit)*

Hamlet. O all you host of heaven! O earth! what
else?

And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart;
And you, my sinews, grow not instantly old,
But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee!
Yes, thou poor ghost, while memory holds her seat
In this distracted head. Remember thee!

Yes, from the tablet of my memory
I'll erase away all foolish impressions,
All proverbs from books, all past impressions,
Which youthful observation copied there;
And thy command alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmixed with baser matter: yes, yes, by heaven!
O most pernicious woman!
O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
My memorandum tablets!—it is fit that I set it down,
That one may smile, and smile, yet be a villain;
At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark. *(Writes)*
So, uncle, there you are. Now to my motto;

It is, 'Adieu, adieu! remember me';
I have sworn to it.

Horatio. } (*Within*) My lord, my lord!

Marcellus. } (*Within*) Lord Hamlet!

Horatio. (*Within*) Heaven secure him!

Hamlet. So be it!

Marcellus. (*Within*) Illo, ho, ho, my lord!

Hamlet. Hillo, ho, ho, boy! Come, bird, come.

Enter Horatio and Marcellus.

Marcellus. How is everything, my noble lord?

Horatio. What news, my lord?

Hamlet. O, wonderful!

Horatio. My good lord, do tell it.

Hamlet. No; you'll reveal it.

Horatio. Not I, my lord, by heaven!

Marcellus. Nor I, my lord.

Hamlet. How say you, then,—would heart of man
ever believe it?

But you'll keep it secret?

Horatio. } Yes, by heaven, my lord.

Marcellus. }

Hamlet. There's not a villain dwelling anywhere in
Denmark

But that's a notorious rogue!

Horatio. No ghost need come from the grave, my
lord,

To tell us this.

Hamlet. Why, right; you have said rightly;

And so, without more beating about at all,

I hold it proper that we shake hands and part:

You, as your business and desire shall call you,—

For every man has business and desire,

Such as it is,—and, for my own poor part,

Mind you, I shall go pray.

Horatio. These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.

Hamlet. I'm sorry they offend you, heartily;
Yes, faith, heartily.

Horatio. There's no offence, my lord.

Hamlet. Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio,
And much offence, too. Concerning this vision,
Let me tell you that it is a true and honourable ghost;
As for your desire to know what is between us,
Overcome it any way you can. And now, good friends,
As truly as you are friends, scholars, and soldiers,
Grant me one trifling request.

Horatio. What is it, my lord? We will.

Hamlet. Never make known what you have seen to-night.

Horatio. } My lord, we will not.
Marcellus. }

Hamlet. Nay, but swear it.

Horatio. In faith,
My lord, not I.

Marcellus. Nor I, my lord, in faith.

Hamlet. Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.

Ghost. (Beneath) Swear!

Hamlet. Ah, ha, boy! do you say so, too? Are you
there, truepenny?

Come on; you hear this fellow in the basement!
Consent to swear.

Horatio. Propose the oath, my lord.

Hamlet. Never to speak of what you have seen.

Swear by my sword.

Ghost (Beneath) Swear!

Hamlet. Here and everywhere? Then we'll shift our
ground.

Come hither, gentlemen,
And lay your hands again upon my sword.
Never to speak of this that you have heard,
Swear by my sword.

Ghost. (Beneath) Swear!

Hamlet. Well said, old mole! can you work in the earth that fast?

A worthy digger! Once more let's move, good friends.

Horatio. O day and night! But this is wondrous strange.

Hamlet. And therefore give it welcome like to a stranger.⁸

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy.

But come:

Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,
However oddly or strangely I conduct myself,—

For I perhaps hereafter may think it fit

To assume an antic disposition,—

That you, at such times seeing me, never shall,

With arms folded thus, or this head shake,

Or by speaking out some ambiguous phrase,

As 'Well, well, we know,' or 'We could talk if we would,'

Or 'If we chose to speak,' or 'There are those, who could tell if they would,'

Or some such ambiguous giving away, to denote

That you know anything about my condition;—this not to do,

So grace and mercy at your need most help you,
Swear.

Ghost (Beneath) Swear!

Hamlet. Rest, rest, perturbed spirit! (*They swear*)
So, gentlemen,

With all my love I commend myself to you;

And what so poor a man as Hamlet is

May be able to do, to express his love and friendliness to you,

God willing, shall not be lacking. Let us go back together;

⁸ That is, by asking no questions.

Ever a finger on your lips, I pray.
 The times are out of joint: O cursed spite,
 That ever I was born to set them right!
 No, come; let's go together.

ACT II

Scene I. A room in Polonius's house.

Enter Polonius and Reynaldo.

Polonius. Give him this money and these notes,
Reynaldo.

Reynaldo. I shall, my lord.

Polonius. You shall do marvellously wisely, good
Reynaldo,

Before you visit him, to make inquiry
Concerning his behaviour.

Reynaldo. My lord, I intended to.

Polonius. By the Virgin, well said,—very well said.
Look you, sir,

Inquire first for me what Danes are living in Paris;
How they live, who they are, their financial condition,
and where they lodge;

Who their companions are, their living expenses; and
finding

By guide and general drift of these inquiries,
Whether they know my son, you will come closer to
the point

Than any direct questions could do;

You assume, as it were, some distant knowledge of
him;

As for instance, 'I know his father and his friends,
And him slightly.' Do you mark this, Reynaldo?

Reynaldo. Yes, very well, my lord.

Polonius. 'And him slightly; but,' you may say, 'not
very well:

But if it be he whom I have in mind, he's very wild,
Addicted so and so'; and there lay to his charge
What made-up tales you please; but, by the Virgin,
 none so gross

As to dishonour him; take heed of that;
But, sir, such wanton, wild, and usual slips,
Which are companions noted and most known
To unbridled youth.

Reynaldo. As gambling, my lord?

Polonius. Yes, or drinking, duelling, swearing,
 quarreling,

Bad women,—you may go so far.

Reynaldo. My lord, that would dishonour him.

Polonius. Faith, no; because you can temper it in the
 charge.

You must not put a further scandal on him,
That he is habitually rather than occasionally inconti-
 nent;

That's not my meaning: but whisper his faults so
 skilfully

That they may seem merely blemishes due to liberty,
The volcanic flashes of a fiery mind,
A savagery of untamed blood,
Which attack youth everywhere.

Reynaldo. But, my good lord,—

Polonius. Why do I want you to do this?

Reynaldo. Yes, my lord,

I would like to know that.

Polonius. By the Blessed Virgin, here's my drift,
And I believe it a justifiable scheme:

Your charging to my son these light faults,
As you would speak of an article soiled by use,
Mark you,

If your party in conversation whom you want to sound,
Has ever seen of the aforesaid crimes
The youth you speak of guilty, you may rest assured
He will agree with your conclusions;

Going on to say, 'Good sir,' or 'friend,' or 'gentleman,'
As accords with the idiom or title
Of man and country.

Reynaldo. Very well, my lord.

Polonius. And then, sir, if he does this,—he does,—
what was I about to say? By the mass, I was
about to say something; where did I leave off?

Reynaldo. At 'agrees with your conclusions'; at
'friend or so,' and 'gentleman.'

Polonius. At 'agrees with your conclusions,'—yes,
yes, by the Virgin;

He may conclude thus: 'I know the gentleman;
I saw him yesterday, or the other day,
Or some other time, with such and such persons, and
as you say,

There he was gambling, there overcome with liquor,
And there falling out with an opponent at tennis'; or
perhaps,

'I saw him enter a certain house of ill-fame.'

You just see

If your bait of falsehood does not catch this carp of
truth;

And thus do we of wisdom and far-sight,
By winding paths and with indirect angling,
By indirect devices find direct information:
So by my present instruction and advice,
Shall you my son. You have understood me, have
you not?

Reynaldo. My lord, I have.

Polonius. God be with you! fare you well.

Reynaldo. And to you, my good lord.

Polonius. Observe his tendencies yourself personally.

Reynaldo. I shall do so, my lord.

Polonius. And let him proceed without interference.

Reynaldo. Very well, my lord.

Polonius. Farewell.

Enter Ophelia

How now, Ophelia! What's the matter?

Ophelia. O, my lord, my lord, I have been so frightened!

Polonius. With what, in God's name?

Ophelia. My lord, as I was sewing in my private room,
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unfastened;
No hat upon his head; his stockings besmirched,
Ungartered, and slipped down to his ankles;
Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other;
And with a look as piteous in expression
As if he had been loosened out of hell
To speak of horrors, comes before me.

Polonius. Mad for your love?

Ophelia. My lord, I do not know,
But truly I do fear so.

Polonius. What did he say?

Ophelia. He took me by the wrist and held me tightly;
Then straightens out his arm,
And, with his other hand thus shading his brow,
He begins a close study of my face
As though he were about to draw it. Long stayed
he thus;

Finally, a little shaking of my arm,
Three times his head thus waving up and down,
He heaved a sigh so piteous and profound
That it seemed to shatter his whole body
And end his being: that done, he lets me go;
And with his head over his shoulder turned
He seemed to find his way without his eyes;
For out of doors he went without their help,
And to the last did bend their light on me.

Polonius. Come, go with me; I will go seek the king.
This is the true insanity of love,
Whose peculiar violence is only self-destructive

And leads the will to desperate undertakings,
As often as any passion under heaven
That afflicts human nature. I am sorry.
By the way, have you spoken any harsh words to him
of late?

Ophelia. No, my good lord; but as you commanded
I hurriedly returned his letters and denied him
Any access to my company.

Polonius. That is what has made him mad.
I am sorry that with better attention and judgment
I did not observe him. I feared he did but trifle,
And meant to wreck your life; but curse my suspicions!
By heaven, it is as characteristic of our age
To overreach ourselves in our judgment
As it is common for the younger sort
To lack discretion. Come, let us go to the king:
This must be made known; were it kept secret it might
cause
More mischief by concealment than anger by dis-
closure.
Come. (*Exeunt*)

Scene 2. A room in the castle.

*Flourish. Enter King, Queen, Rosencrantz, Guilden-
stern, and Attendants.*

King. Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern!
Besides the fact that we greatly longed to see you,
The need we have of your services provoked
Our hasty summons. You have heard something
Of Hamlet's transformation; so I call it,
Since neither the outward nor the inward man
Resembles what it was. What it should be,
More than his father's death, that has thus put him
So far from understanding his own condition,

I cannot imagine. I entreat you both,
That, having been reared with him from childhood,
And so intimately associated with his youth and dis-
position,

That you will please remain here in our court
Some little time; thus by your company
To divert him into pastimes, and to discover
As much from opportunities as you can gather,
Whether anything, to us unknown, afflicts him thus,
And, brought to light, may be remedied by us.

Queen. Good gentlemen, he has often talked of you;
And I am sure there are not two men living
To whom he clings more closely. If it will please you
To show us so much courtesy and good will
In spending your time with us awhile
For the aid and realization of our hope,
Your visit shall receive such thanks
As befits a king's remembrance.

Rosencrantz. Both your majesties
Might better, by the sovereign power you have over us,
Express your highly respected wishes more in the form
of command

Than in that of entreaty.

Guildestern. We shall both obey,
And here tender ourselves, in full inclination
To lay our services freely at your feet,
At your command.

King. Thanks, noble Rosencrantz and Guildestern.

Queen. Thanks, noble Guildestern and Rosencrantz:
And I beseech you immediately to visit
My too much changed son. Go, some of you,
And take the gentlemen into Hamlet's presence.

Guildestern. May heaven make our presence and
devices

Pleasant and beneficial to him.

Queen.

Ay, amen!

(Exeunt Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and some Attendants.)

Enter Polonius.

Polonius. The ambassadors from Norway, my good lord,

Have joyfully returned.

King. You always have been the source of good news.

Polonius. Have I, my lord? Be assured, my good liege,

That I hold my duty sacred as my soul,
Both to my God and to my gracious king;
And I do believe, or else this brain of mine
Follows not the path of diplomacy as surely
As it has been accustomed to do, that I have found
The real cause of Hamlet's lunacy.

King. O, speak of that; I long to hear about it.

Polonius. First give audience to the ambassadors;
My news shall be dessert to that great feast.

King. You will do me the kindness to bring them in.

(Exit Polonius.)

He tells me, my dear Gertrude, he has found
The fountain-head of your son's ailment.

Queen. I suspect it is nothing other than the main
cause,——

His father's death, and our precipitate marriage.

King. Well, we shall sift him.

Re-enter Polonius, with Voltimand and Cornelius.

Welcome, my good friends!

Say, Voltimand, what news from our brother Norway?

Voltimand. Most fair return of greetings and best wishes.

After our first conference he sent out orders to suppress

His nephew's levies of soldiers, which appeared to him
To be a preparation against Poland;
But further investigated he truly discovered
It aimed against your highness: whereupon grieved
That his sickness, age, and impotence
Was so taken advantage of, sends out arrests
On Fortinbras; which the latter, in brief, obeys;
Receives a rebuke from Norway, and in conclusion
Makes a vow before his uncle never more
To make a trial of arms against your majesty.
Thereupon old Norway, overcome with joy,
Grants him an annual sum of three thousand crowns,
And a commission to employ those soldiers,
Precisely levied as before, against Poland;
With an entreaty, herein detailed, (*Giving a paper*)
That you would please grant quiet passage
Through your dominions for this enterprise,
On such terms as may be both safe and allowable
Therein outlined.

King. This is pleasing to us;
And when we have time for further deliberation we'll
read,
Make answer, and meditate upon this affair.
Meantime we thank you for your well-undertaken
labour.

Go to your rest; at night we'll feast together:
Most welcome home!

(Exeunt Voltimand and Cornelius)

Polonius. This business is well ended.
My liege, and madam, fully to discuss
What majesty should be, what duty is,
Why day is day, night night, and time is time,
Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time.
Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wisdom,
And tediousness but the limbs and outward gestures,

I will be brief. Your noble son is mad:
 Mad call I it; for, to define true madness,
 What is it but to be nothing else but mad?
 But let that go.

Queen. More facts and less style.
Polonius. Madam, I swear I use no ornament at all.
 That he is mad, 'tis true; 'tis true 'tis pity,
 And pity 'tis 'tis true: a foolish figure!
 But let it go, for I will use no rhetoric.
 Mad let us then grant him; and it now remains
 That we find out the cause of this effect,
 Or rather, let us say, the cause of this defect,
 For this effect defective comes by cause:
 Thus it remains, and the remainder thus.
 Now consider.
 I have a daughter—have while she is mine—
 Who, in her filial duty and obedience, mark you,
 Has given me this letter; now get the facts, then sur-
 mise what you will.

(Reads the letter)

"To the celestial and my soul's idol, the most beauti-
 fied Ophelia,——"

That's an ill phrase, a vile phrase; 'beautified' is a vile
 phrase. But you shall hear. Thus:

"In her excellent white bosom, these, etc."

Queen. Came this from Hamlet to her?

Polonius. Good madam, wait awhile. I will be
 faithful. *(Reads)*

"Doubt thou the stars are fire,
 Doubt that the sun doth move,
 Doubt truth to be a liar,
 But never doubt I love.

"O dear Ophelia, I am a bad poet. I have not the art
 to express metrically my groans; but that I love
 thee best, O most best, believe me. Adieu.

"Thine evermore, most dear lady,
As long as this body is his,

HAMLET."

This in due obedience has my daughter shown me,
And more than that, all his solicitings,
As they occurred in point of time, and as regards
means, and place,
Have been given to my hearing.

King.

But how has she

Received his love?

Polonius.

What do you think of me?

King. As of a man who is faithful and honourable.

Polonius. I always hope to prove so. But what would
you have thought,

If when I had seen this hot love awing—

For I perceived it, I must tell you that,

Before my daughter told me—what would you,

Or my dear majesty your queen here, have thought,

If I had acted like a desk or writing-tablet,

Or had hinted to my heart to be blind, mute and dumb,

Or had looked upon this love without taking action;

What would you have thought? No, I immediately
went to work,

And my young mistress thus did I address:

'Lord Hamlet is a prince, outside your sphere;

This must not be.' And then I gave her instructions

That she should lock herself from his approaches,

Admit no messengers, receive no tokens.

This done, she profited by my advice;

And he, repulsed—to make a short story—

Fell into a melancholy, from that into a fast,

Then into sleeplessness, thence into weakness,

From that into a lightness of head, and by this descent

Into the madness wherein he now raves,

And for which we all do mourn.

King.

Do you think it is this?

Queen. It may very likely be.

Polonius. Has there ever been a time—I would like to know—

That I have positively said 'Tis so,'
And it proved to be otherwise?

King. Not that I know of.

Polonius. Take my head from my shoulders, if this
be otherwise.

If circumstances direct me, I will find
Where truth is hidden, though it were hidden indeed
In the earth's centre.

King. How may we test this further?

Polonius. As you know, he walks sometimes four
hours at a stretch

Here in the lobby.

Queen. So he does, indeed.

Polonius. At such time I'll put my daughter in his
way:

Let you and me be hidden behind the wall-curtain;
Observe the encounter: if he does not love her
And deprived of reason on that account,
Let me be no longer assistant to the king,
But keep a farm and teamsters.

King. We will try it.

Enter Hamlet, reading a book.

Queen. Look at the poor wretch coming sadly, reading.

Polonius. Away, I beseech you, both go away;
I'll address him at once.

(Exeunt King, Queen, and Attendants)

O, give me leave.

How does my good Lord Hamlet?

Hamlet. Well, God have mercy!

Polonius. Do you know me, my lord?

Hamlet. Excellently well; you are a fish-merchant.

Polonius. Not I, my lord.

Hamlet. Then I would wish you were so honest a man.

Polonius. Honest, my lord!

Hamlet. Yes; to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.

Polonius. That's very true, my lord.

Hamlet. For if the sun engenders maggots in a dead dog, it being a carrion fit for sun-kissing,—Have you a daughter?

Polonius. I have, my lord.

Hamlet. Let her then not walk in the sun; conception is a blessing, but not as your daughter may conceive. Friend,

Look after it.

Polonius. (*Aside*) What do you say about that! Still harping on my daughter: yet me did not know me at first; he said that I was a fish-merchant; he is far gone, far gone: and to tell the truth in my own youth I suffered much extremity for love; very near to this. I'll speak to him again. What are you reading, my lord?

Hamlet. Words, words, words.

Polonius. What is the matter, my lord?

Hamlet. Between whom?

Polonius. I mean the reading-matter, my lord.

Hamlet. Slanders, sir; for the satirical rogue says here that old men have gray beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes oozing thick amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have a conspicuous lack of presence of mind, together with very weak haunches; all of which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe it, I maintain is not propriety to have it thus set down; for you yourself, sir, would be only as old as I am, if, in years, like a crab's body, you could travel backward.

Polonius (*Aside*) Though this be madness, yet there is method in it.

Will you walk in, out of the air, my lord?

Hamlet. Into my grave?

Polonius. Indeed, that is out of the air. (*Aside*)

How apt sometimes his replies are! an appropriateness that madness often hits upon, which reason and sanity could not be felicitously delivered of. I will leave him, and contrive circumstances for a sudden meeting between him and my daughter. My honourable lord, I most humbly take my leave of you.

Hamlet. You cannot, sir, take any thing from me that I will more willingly part with—(*Aside*) except my life, except my life, except my life.

Polonius. Fare you well, my lord.

Hamlet. These tedious old fools!

Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Polonius. You are seeking the Lord Hamlet; there he is.

Rosencrantz. (*To Polonius*) God save you, sir!
(*Exit Polonius*)

Guildenstern. My honoured lord!

Rosencrantz. My most dear lord!

Hamlet. My excellent good friends! How do you do, Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how fare you both?

Rosencrantz. As the average children of the earth.

Guildenstern. Happy, in that we are not overhappy. On Fortune's cap we are not the crowning button.

Hamlet. Nor the soles of her shoes?

Rosencrantz. Neither, my lord.

Hamlet. Then you live about her waist, or midway in her favours? What's the news?

Rosencrantz. None, my lord, but that the world's grown honest.

Hamlet. Then doomsday is near; but your news is not true.

Let me question you more in particular. What have, you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune, that she sends you to prison hither?

Guildenstern. Prison, my lord!

Hamlet. Denmark's a prison.

Rosencrantz. Then the world is one.

Hamlet. A spacious one; in which there are many cells, wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one of the worst.

Rosencrantz. We do not think so, my lord.

Hamlet. Why, then 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so: to me it is a prison.

Rosencrantz. Why, then your ambition makes it one; it is too narrow for your mind.

Hamlet. O God, I could be a worm bounded by a nut shell and count myself king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.

Guildenstern. Which dreams, indeed, are ambition; for the seemingly substantial things which the ambitious pursue are merely shadows of dreams.

Hamlet. A dream itself is only a shadow.

Rosencrantz. Truly, and I regard ambition itself to be of so airy and light a quality that it is but a shadow's shadow.

Hamlet. Then beggars, who have no ambition, are substantial people; and our monarchs and far-grasping heroes, with their ambition, are but shadows of the beggars. Shall we go in to the court? for, by my faith, I cannot reason.

Rosencrantz. }
Guildenstern. } Let us be your servants.

Hamlet. Nothing of the kind: I will not mix you in with the rest of my servants; for, to talk like an honest man, I am most abominably waited upon.

But, on the well-trod road of friendship, what are you doing in Elsinore?

Rosencrantz. To visit you, my lord; no other purpose.

Hamlet. Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks; but I thank you: and surely, dear friends, my thanks are too dear at a half-penny. Were you not sent for? Is it purely your own inclination? Is this a voluntary visitation? Come, deal justly with me: come, come; nay, speak.

Guildestern. What should we say, my lord?

Hamlet. Why any thing to the point. You were sent for; and there is a kind of confession in your looks which your modesty has not enough cunning to disguise. I am aware that the good king and queen have sent for you.

Rosencrantz. For what purpose, my lord?

Hamlet. That, you must teach me. But let me conjure you, by the rights of our fellowship together, by our agreement in age and youth, by the obligations of our enduring love, and by what still more dear than a better speaker than I could charge you with, be plain and straightforward with me; as to whether you were sent for or not.

Rosencrantz. (*Aside to Guildestern*) What do you say?

Hamlet. (*Aside*) Ah, now I shall keep an eye on you. If you love me do not hold back.

Guildestern. My lord, we were sent for.

Hamlet. I shall tell you why, in order that my anticipation shall precede any disclosure by you, and your secrecy need not have dropped a single syllable. I have of late—but for what reason I know not—lost all my mirth, given up all practice of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excel-

lent canopy, the air, look you, this lovely o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof, fretted with golden fire, why it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how expressive and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? man delights me not; no, nor woman, either, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

Rosencrantz. My lord, there was no such stuff in my thoughts.

Hamlet. Why did you laugh then, when I said 'man delights me not?'

Rosencrantz. To think, my lord, if you delight not in man, what meagre entertainment the players shall receive from you; we passed around them on the way, and here they are coming to offer you service.

Hamlet. He that plays the king shall be welcome; his majesty shall receive tribute from me; the adventurous knight shall use his foil and shield; the lover shall not sigh for nothing; the eccentric man shall end his part in peace; the clown shall make those laugh who have lungs readily moved to laughter; and the lady shall speak her mind freely though she mutilate the blank verse. What players are they?

Rosencrantz. The same ones you used to take such delight in, the tragedians of the city.

Hamlet. How does it happen that they travel? their residence in the city, both in reputation and income, would be better, both ways.

Rosencrantz. I think their suspension of performance comes as a result of the recent innovation.

Hamlet. Do they not hold the same popular regard which they did when I was in the city? are they still well patronized?

Rosencrantz. No, indeed, they are not.

Hamlet. How does it come? are they growing rusty?

Rosencrantz. Not that, either, for their endeavours keep the accustomed pace; but there is, sir, a sturdy brood of children, young hawks, who scream out their lines at the top of their voices, and get most violently applauded for it: these are now all the rage, and so berate the ordinary theatres—so they call them—that their patrons are deserting them for fear of satirical attacks on the part of the children's playwrights.

Hamlet. What, are they children? who maintains them? how are they salaried? Will they follow the profession only till their voices change? will they not say afterward, when they grow into ordinary players—which is most likely to happen, unless they find better means of subsistence—that their playwrights have done them wrong, to make them ruin their own future prospects?

Rosencrantz. In faith, there has been ado on both sides; and the nation does not consider it a sin to urge them on to controversy; there was for awhile no money bid for the plot of a play unless the poet and the actor indulged in fisticuffs somewhere in the dialogue.

Hamlet. Is it possible?

Guildenstern. O, there has been much tossing about of wits.

Hamlet. Do the boys sweep everything before them?

Rosencrantz. Yes, they do, my lord; even the Globe is affected.

Hamlet. It is not very strange, after all; for my uncle is king of Denmark, and those who used to make faces at him while my father was alive, now give

twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred ducats apiece for his miniature. God's blood! there is something more than human nature in these things, if philosophy could find it out.

(Flourish of trumpets within)

Guildestern. There come the players.

Hamlet. Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore. Give me your hands, come; the proper accompaniment is merely ceremonious form: let me formally receive you in this style, lest my familiar courtesy in receiving the players, which, you know, must look cordial externally should appear more friendly than mine to you. You are welcome; but my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.

Guildestern. In what, my dear lord?

Hamlet. I am but mad when the wind blows one direction,—when it is otherwise I can distinguish hypocrisy from innocence.

Re-enter Polonius.

Polonius. May everything be well with you, gentlemen!

Hamlet. Hark you, Guildestern; and you, too; at each ear a hearer: that great baby you see there is not yet out of his swaddling clouts.

Rosencrantz. Perhaps he's come to them the second time, for they say an old man comes to second childhood.

Hamlet. I will prophesy that he comes to tell me of the players; mark it. You say right, sir: on Monday morning; it was so, indeed.

Polonius. My lord, I have news to tell you.

Hamlet. My lord, I have news to tell you. When Roscius was an actor in Rome—

Polonius. The actors have come hither, my lord.

Hamlet. Buz, buz!

Polonius. Upon my honour—

Hamlet. Then came each actor on his ass—

Polonius. The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, observing the unities or disregarding them; Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light. When it comes either to strict adherence to rules or to extemporizing, these are the only men.

Hamlet. O Jephthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!

Polonius. What treasure had he, my lord?

Hamlet. Why,

‘One fair daughter, and no more,
The which he loved passing well.’

Polonius. (*Aside*) Still on my daughter.

Hamlet. Am I not in the right, old Jephthah?

Polonius. If you call me Jephthah, my lord, I have a daughter whom I love passing well.

Hamlet. No, that is not what follows.

Polonius. What does follow, then, my lord?

Hamlet. Why,

‘As by lot, God wot,’

and then you know,

‘It came to pass, as most like it was,’—

the first stanza of the pious ballad¹ will show you more; for look, here come my abridgers.

Enter four or five Players.

You are welcome, masters; welcome, all. I am glad to see you well. Welcome, good friends. O, my

¹ Hamlet here is quoting a popular Elizabethan religious ballad, registered 1567-68, and entitled *Jephtha, Judge of Israel*. The lines are therefore historical but anachronistic.

old friend! Your face is fringed since I saw you last. What, my young lady and mistress! By our Lady, your ladyship is nearer heaven than when I saw you last by the height of an Italian cork heel. Pray God that your voice, like a piece of uncurrent gold, may not have broken so greatly as to have lost its value. Masters, you are all welcome. We shall go after things like French falconers do,—turn loose at every thing we see; we'll have a speech forthwith. Come, give us a sample of your skill; come, a passionate speech.

I Player. What speech, my lord?

Hamlet. I once heard you deliver a speech, but it was never acted; or, if it was, not more than once; for the play, I remember, pleased not the million; it was too complex for general tastes: but it was—as it impressed me, and others, whose judgment in such matters outweighed mine—an excellent play with well proportioned and arranged scenes, and written with as much correctness as shrewdness. I remember hearing it said that there were no improprieties in the lines to make the substance of them zestful, nor any substance in the phrasing that might indict the author of affectation; but it was honourable in method, as wholesome as sweet, and with far more natural charm than artificial. One speech in it I chiefly loved: it was *Æneas'* tale to Dido, and that part of it particularly where the Trojan prince tells about Priam's murder. If you still retain it in memory, begin at this line; let me see, let me see,—

'The rugged Pyrrhus, like the Hyrcanian beast'—it is not thus; it begins with Pyrrhus:

'The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms,
Black as his purpose, did the night resemble
When he lay concealed in the fateful horse,
Has now this dreadful black complexion smeared

With coat of arms more dismal; head to foot
He is now dyed red, horribly adorned
With the blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, and
sons,

Baked into paste with parching dust;
The streets lending tyrannous and damned light
To their vile murders. Roasted in rage and fire
And besmeared with clotted blood,
With eyes like burning red coals, the hellish Pyrrhus
Old grandsire Priam seeks!

So, you proceed.

Polonius. Before God, my lord, well spoken, with
good accent and good judgment.

I Player. 'Presently he finds him
Striking too shortly at Greeks; his ancient sword,
Rebellious with his arm, lies where it falls,
Disobedient to command: thus, unequally matched
Pyrrhus drives down on Priam; in rage strikes wide;
But with the whiff and twist of his cruel sword
The unnerved patriarch falls. Then insensible Troy,
Becoming conscious of this blow, with flaming roof
Crashes to its foundation, and with the hideous roar
Catches Pyrrhus' ear; for, lo! his sword,
Descending on the snowy head
Of the venerable Priam, seemed in the air transfixed;
So, as a tapestried tyrant, Pyrrhus stood;
Ignoring his own desires and endeavour,
Did nothing.

But, as we often see, just before some storm,
A silence in the heavens, the mass of clouds stand still,
The bold winds speechless and the earth below
As hushed as death, at once the terrific thunder
Rends the skies; so, after Pyrrhus' pause,
Revived vengeance sets him at work anew,
And never did the Cyclops' hammer fall
On Mars's armour, forged for eternal resistance,
With less remorse than Pyrrhus' bloody sword

Now falls on Priam.

Away, thou harlot, Fortune! All you gods,
In general conclave take away her power;
Break all the spokes and felloes from her wheel,
And bowl the round hub down the long hill of heaven
As low as hell itself!

Polonius. This is too long.

Hamlet. It shall go to the barber's, with your beard.

I pray you, recite on; come to Hecuba.

1 Player. 'But who, O who had seen the muffled
queen'——

Hamlet. 'The muffled queen?'

Polonius. That's good; 'muffled queen' is good.

1 Player. 'Run barefoot up and down, threatening the
flames

With blinding tears; a clout upon that head
Where lately the diadem had stood; and for a robe,
About her lank and exhausted loins
A blanket, in the alarm of fear caught up;
Whosoever had seen this, with tongue in venom
steeped

Would have proposed treason against the throne of
Fortune:

But if the gods did see her then,
When she saw Pyrrhus making malicious sport
In chopping with his sword her husband's limbs,
The sudden burst of clamour that she made,—
Unless things mortal affect them not at all,—
Would have dimmed with tears the burning eyes of
heaven.

And roused compassion in the gods.

Polonius. Look,—he has lost his colour, and has tears
in his eyes. I pray you, no more.

Hamlet. 'Tis well; I'll have you recite the rest of this
soon. My good lord, will you see the players well
lodged? Do you hear, let them be well looked
after, for they are the epitome and brief chronicles

of the age; after your death it were better to have a bad epitaph than their ill will while you lived.

Polonius. My lord, I will use them according to their desert.

Hamlet. God's bodykins, man, much better! use every man after his desert, and who would escape whipping? Use them after the dictates of your own honour and dignity; the less they deserve, the more merit there is in your bounty. Take them in.

Polonius. Come, sirs.

Hamlet. Follow him, friends; we'll hear a play to-morrow.

(Exit Polonius with all the Players except the First)

Dost thou hear me, old friend? can you play *The Murder of Gonzago*?

1 Player. Yes, my lord.

Hamlet. We'll have it tomorrow night. You could, in an emergency, study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines, which I would write and insert in it, could you not?

1 Player. Yes, my lord.

Hamlet. Very well. Follow that lord; and look that you do not mock him.

(Exit 1 Player)

My good friends, I'll leave you till night; you are welcome to Elsinore.

Rosencrantz. My good lord!

Hamlet. And so, good-bye.

(Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern)

Now I am alone.

O what a rogue and peasant slave I am!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,

Only in a fiction, in an emotional make-believe,
Could so force his soul to his own imagination
That from its working his face completely paled,
With tears in his eyes, distraction in his visage,
A broken voice, and all his bodily actions
Appropriate to his conception? and all for naught!
For Hecuba!

What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would he do
Had he the prompting motive for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage in tears
And split the ear of the general public with awful
speech,

Make mad the guilty and appall the innocent,
Confuse the ignorant, and astound indeed
The hearing and the seeing faculties. Yet I,
A dull and irresolute rascal, mope,
Like John-a-dreams, uninspired by my cause,
And can say nothing; no, not even for a king,
Upon whose possessions and most dear life
Damnable ruin was wrought. Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain? strikes me over the head?
Pulls off my beard and blows it in my face?
Tweaks me by the nose? calls me liar with galling
insult,

Which I fear to resent? Who does this to me?
Ha!

Zounds! I'd take it; for it cannot be otherwise
But that like the pigeon's liver, I lack gall
To make me feel the bitterness of oppression, or before
this

I would have fattened all the kites of the air
With this slave's remains. Bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, unnatural villain!
O vengeance!

Why, what an ass am I! surely this is a fine show,
That I, the son of a dear father murdered,

Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a prostitute, relieve my oppression with
words,
And fall to cursing, like a very harlot,
A scullion!
Fie upon it! Foh! Wits, to work! I have heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been so struck to the soul that thereupon
They have proclaimed their malefactions;
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
Through some miraculous organ. I'll have these
players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before my uncle: I'll observe his looks;
I'll probe him to the quick: if he but flinch
I know my course. The spirit I have seen
May be the devil; and the devil has power
To assume a pleasing shape; yes, and perhaps
Takes advantage of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Deludes me that he may damn me. I'll have grounds
More conclusive than this. The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

ACT III

Scene 1. A room in the castle.

*Enter King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz,
and Guildenstern.*

King. And can you, by no roundabout course,
Get from him the cause for this confusion,
Grating so harshly his days of quiet
With turbulent and dangerous lunacy?

Rosencrantz. He confesses that he feels himself dis-
tracted;

But from what cause he will by no means speak.

Guildenstern. Nor do we find him disposed to be
sounded,

But with a crafty madness he holds aloof,
When we tried to bring him to some confession
Of his true condition.

Queen. Did he receive you well?

Rosencrantz. Most like a gentleman.

Guildenstern. But with much forced politeness.

Rosencrantz. Evasive when questioned, but most
cordial to our own interests.

Queen. Did you tempt him

To any pastime?

Rosencrantz. Madam, it so befell that certain players
Were overtaken by us on the way; of these we told
him,

And there seemed to appear in him a kind of joy

To hear of it. They are here at court,

And, as I think, already have orders

This night to play before him.

Polonius. 'Tis most true;

And he besought me to entreat your majesties

To hear and see the play.

King. With all my heart; and it much gratifies me

To hear him so inclined.

Good gentlemen, whet him on,

And incite his purpose further to indulge in these
entertainments.

Rosencrantz. We shall, my lord.

(Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern)

King. Sweet Gertrude, leave us, too;

For we have secretly summoned Hamlet hither,

That he may, as though it were by accident,

Here confront Ophelia.

Her father and myself, lawful spies,

Will so conceal ourselves that, seeing unseen,

We may frankly judge by their encounter

And gather from him, according to his behaviour,

Whether or not it is the affliction of love

That causes him so to suffer.

Queen. I shall obey you.

And for your part, Ophelia, I trust

That your charm and beauty may be the causes

Of Hamlet's wildness; so shall I hope your virtues

May bring him to his former ways again,

With honour to both.

Ophelia. Madam, I wish they may.

(Exit Queen)

Polonius. Ophelia, you walk here. May it please your
grace,

We will now conceal ourselves. *(To Ophelia)* Read
in this book;

That the show of such occupation may excuse

Your loneliness. We are often to blame here—
It is proved too much—that with the outward face of
devotion

And pious action we do sugar-coat
The devil himself.

King. (Aside) O, 'tis only too true!
How severe a lash that speech gives to my conscience!
The harlot's cheek, beautified with plastering art,
Is not more ugly compared with paint itself
Than is my deed to my most hypocritical word.
O heavy burden!

Polonius. I hear him coming; let us withdraw, my
lord.

(Exeunt King and Polonius)

Enter Hamlet

Hamlet. To be, or not to be,—that is the question;
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them. To die,—to sleep,—
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to,—'tis a consummation
Most devoutly to be wish'd. To die,—to sleep,—
To sleep! perchance to dream! ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there's the consideration
That makes calamity of too long a life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's scorn,
The pangs of unprized love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merits from the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quittance make

With a mere dagger? who would these burdens bear,
To groan and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country from whose boundaries
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us choose to bear those ills we have
Than flee to others that we know naught of?
Thus deliberation makes cowards of us all;
And thus the natural colour of resoluteness
Is made sickly with the pallid hue of anxiety,
And enterprises of great pith and import
With this regard their currents turn aside,
And lose the name of action. Soft, now!
The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy prayers
Be all my sins remembered.

Ophelia. My good lord,

How does your honour these many days past?

Hamlet. I humbly thank you; well, well, well.

Ophelia. My lord, I have remembrances of yours,
Which I have long wished to re-deliver;

I pray you, now receive them.

Hamlet. No, not I;

I never gave you anything.

Ophelia. My honoured lord, you know right well you
did;

And accompanying them words of such sweet senti-
ment composed

As made the things more precious: the perfume gone,

Now take them back; for to the noble mind

Rich gifts become poor when givers prove unkind.

There, my lord.

Hamlet. Ha, ha! are you virtuous?

Ophelia. My lord!

Hamlet. Are you fair?

Ophelia. What does your lordship mean?

Hamlet. That if you are both virtuous and fair, your
virtue should most carefully guard your beauty.

Ophelia. Could beauty, my lord, have better association than with virtue?

Hamlet. Yes, indeed; for beauty can more easily transform virtue from what it is to evil, than virtue can retranslate beauty into its likeness: this was once a paradox, but now time gives it proof. I did love you once.

Ophelia. Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

Hamlet. You should not have believed me, for virtue cannot so purify our old nature but that we shall still be tintured with it; I loved you not.¹

Ophelia. I was the more deceived.

Hamlet. Go your way to a nunnery; why should you want to become the mother of sinners? I am myself fairly virtuous, but still I could accuse myself of such things that it would have been better had my mother not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offenses at my command than I have thoughts to mould them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I be doing, crawling between heaven and earth? We are cowardly rogues, all; believe none of us. Go your way to a nunnery. Where's your father?

Ophelia. At home, my lord.²

Hamlet. Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in his own house.³ Farewell.

Ophelia. O help him, you sweet heavens!

Hamlet. If you do marry, take this plague for a dowry: though you may be as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, you shall not escape slander. Get thee to a nunnery, go; farewell. Or, if you must

¹ Here Hamlet probably makes a gesture of anguish and supreme renunciation (behind Ophelia's back, of course).

² Bradley terms this "a heroic lie."

³ Does Hamlet catch sight of Polonius behind the wall-curtain, or just plainly surmise that he is under secret surveillance?

marry, marry a fool; for intelligent men know well enough how you will point them out for ridicule. To a nunnery, go; and quickly, too. Farewell.

Ophelia. O you heavenly powers, restore him!

Hamlet. I have heard of your disguisings of the truth, too, well enough; God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another: you walk and you talk affectedly, and misname what God has created, and excuse your misconduct by pretending ignorance. Go away,—I'll have no more of it; it has made me mad. I say, we will have no more marriages: those who are married already shall live, all but one; the rest shall stay as they are. Away to a nunnery, go. (*Exit*)

Ophelia. O, what a noble mind is here overthrown! The courtier's taste, the soldier's courage, and scholar's eloquence;

The hope and the flower of this fair kingdom,
The mirror of fashion and model of behaviour,
Imitated by all observers, quite, quite down!
And I, of ladies most dejected and wretched,
Who believed the sweetness of his musical vows,
Now see that noble and most superior reason,
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;
That matchless form of full-blooming youth
Blasted with insanity. O, woe is me,
To see what I have seen, and to see what now I see!

Re-enter King and Polonius.

King. Love! his mental state does not tend in that direction;

Nor what he spoke, though lacking form a little,
Like madness. There's something on his soul
Over which his melancholy sits on brood,
And I am fearful the hatching of the egg

Will be something dangerous ; which to prevent,
I have with prompt determination
Thus made up a plan : he shall go with speed to England,
In order to demand our neglected tribute payment.
Perhaps diverse seas and countries
With varying objects of interest shall expel
This somewhat fixed trouble in his mind,
On which his brain still beating puts him thus
From his usual path of conduct. What do you think
about it ?

Polonius. It is bound to do good ; but I yet believe
The source and origin of his grief
Sprang from neglected love. How now, Ophelia !
You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said ;
We heard it all. My lord, do as you please,
But, if you see fit, after the play
Let his queen mother all alone entreat him
To show his cause of grief : let her be plain with him ;
And I'll be placed, so please you, where I can hear
All their conference. If she discover not the cause,
To England send him, or else confine him where
Your wisdom shall think best.

King. It shall be so ;
Madness in high rank must not unwatched go.

Scene 2. A hall in the castle.

Enter Hamlet and the Players.

Hamlet. Speak that speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue ; but if you mouth it, as many of our players do, I had as soon the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but do everything with moderation ; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, the whirlwind

of passionate expression, you must acquire and beget a restraint that shall give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a boisterous, be-wigged fellow tear an emotion to tatters, to very rags, in order to split the ears of those in the pit, who for the most part, are capable of understanding nothing but unintelligible pantomimes and noise. I would want such a fellow whipped for overdoing the part of Termagant; it outvies the rôle of Herod in bluster; pray you, avoid it.

I Player. I guarantee your honour.

Hamlet. Do not be too tame, either, but let your judgment be your tutor; suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this particular care, that you never overstep the moderation of nature; for anything so overdone is contrary to the very purpose of playing, the goal of which, from the beginning down till now, was and is, to hold, as it were, the mirror up to nature;⁴ to reflect back to virtue her own face, to scorn her own image, and to the age its very form and character. Now this overdone, or feebly done, though it may make the untrained laugh, cannot but make those of discernment grieve; the opinion of one of the latter must, in your estimation, outweigh a whole theatre full of the former. O, there are players whom I have seen play, and have heard others praise, and that highly, not to speak profanely, that, having neither the accent nor the gait of Christian, pagan, or man, have so strutted about and bellowed that I have thought some of nature's inferior mechanics had attempted to make men and had not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

I Player. I hope we have reformed that tolerably well with us, sir.

⁴This is Shakespeare's definition of art.

Hamlet. O, reform it completely. And keep those who play clowns' parts from extemporizing jests; for there are some of them who will laugh themselves in order to get a certain number of dull-witted spectators to laugh, also, though right at the time some important feature of the drama was under serious consideration: that is outrageous, and shows a most pitiful and paltry ambition in the fool who attempts it. Go, get yourselves ready. *(Exeunt Players)*

Enter Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern.

How now, my lord! will the king listen to this piece?

Polonius. And the queen, too, and that at once.

Hamlet. Bid the players to make haste. *(Exit Polonius)*

Will you two also help to hasten them?

Rosencrantz. } We will, my lord.
Guildenstern. }

(Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern)

Hamlet. What, ho, Horatio!

Enter Horatio.

Horatio. Here, sweet lord, at your service.

Hamlet. Horatio, you are as just a man
As ever I held conversation with.

Horatio. O, my dear lord,—

Hamlet. No, do not think I flatter,
For what material advancement may I hope from you
Whose only income is his good spirits
To feed and clothe himself? Why should the poor
be flattered?

No, let the sugared tongue lick absurd pomp,
And the ready knee be bent

Where profit may come from fawning. Do you hear?
 Ever since my dear soul was mistress of her choosing
 And could among men discriminate, her selection
 Has sealed you for herself; for you have been
 Like one, who, suffering all things, has suffered nothing,—

A man who has taken Fortune's buffets and her rewards
 With equal thanks; and blessed are those
 Whose emotions and reason are so well balanced
 That they are not a pipe for Fortune's fingers
 To play what stops she pleases. Give me that man
 Who is not the slave of impulse, and I will wear him
 In my heart's core, yes, in my heart of hearts,
 Even as I do you. But too much of this.
 There's a play tonight before the king;
 One scene of it comes close to the circumstances
 Which I have told you surrounded my father's death.
 I pray you, when you see that act performed,
 With all your powers of observation
 Watch my uncle. If his unseen guilt
 Does not reveal itself at one speech,
 It is an unsaved Ghost that we have seen,
 And my imagination is as foul
 As Vulcan's smithy. Give him close attention;
 For I my eyes will rivet on his face,
 And afterward we shall compare our judgments
 In deciding about his behaviour.

Horatio. Well, my lord;
 If he steal anything while this play is playing
 And escape detection, I will pay the theft.

Danish march. Blare of trumpets. Enter King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and other Lords attending, with Guards carrying torches.

Hamlet. They are coming to the play; I must appear idle.

Get you a place.

King. How fares our relative Hamlet?

Hamlet. Excellently well, in faith; on the chameleon's favourite dish. I eat the air, crammed with promises; you cannot feed capons so.

King. I cannot make anything out of this answer, Hamlet; these words are not mine.

Hamlet. No, nor mine, now. (*To Polonius*) My lord, you played once in the university, you say?

Polonius. That I did, my lord, and was accounted a good actor.

Hamlet. And what did you enact?

Polonius. I enacted Julius Cæsar; I was killed in the Capitol; Brutus killed me.

Hamlet. It was the brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there.⁵ Are the players ready?

Rosencrantz. Yes, my lord; they await your pleasure.

Queen. Come hither, my dear Hamlet; sit by me.

Hamlet. No, good mother, here's metal more attractive. (*Lying down at Ophelia's feet.*)

Polonius. (*To the King*) O, ho! do you mark that?

Ophelia. You are merry, my lord.

Hamlet. Who, I?

Ophelia. Yes, my lord.

Hamlet. O, God, only your entertainer. What else should a man do but be merry? for look how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father only dead two hours.

Ophelia. Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord.

Hamlet. That long? Nay, then, let devil wear black, for I'll resume rich colours. O heavens! to die two months ago, and not yet forgotten? Then there's hope that a great man's memory may out-

⁵ Hamlet could choose no surer method of convincing Polonius and the Court of his "insanity" than by ill-bred language, as he did previously in calling Polonius a fish-merchant. Hamlet is a ordinarily would be quite foreign to his instincts and training. gentleman by birth and breeding, and remarks of this character

live his life half a year; but, by Our Lady, he must order churches built, or else not be remembered, along with the late hobby-horse,* whose epitaph is, 'For, O, for, O, the hobby-horse is forgot.'

Oboes play. The dumb-show enters.

Enter a King and a Queen with affectionate behaviour, the Queen embracing him. She kneels and makes eloquent protests of affection to him. He lifts her to her feet, and puts his head against hers. He then lies down on a bank of flowers. She, observing him sleep, leaves him. At once there comes a man, takes off the King's crown and kisses it, pours poison in the sleeper's ears, and makes an exit. The Queen returns, finds the King dead, and makes passionate gestures. The poisoner, with two or three others, come in again, and professes lamentation with her. The dead body is carried away. The poisoner woos the Queen with gifts; she seems unwilling awhile, but finally accepts his love. (Exeunt)

Ophelia. What does this mean, my lord?

Hamlet. By the Virgin, this is miching mallecho; it means skulking mischief.

Ophelia. Very likely this show forecasts the plot of the play.

Enter Prologue.

Hamlet. We shall know from this fellow. The players cannot keep counsel; they'll tell all by and by.

Ophelia. Will he tell us what the dumb-show meant?

Hamlet. Yes, or any show you'll show him; be not

* A grotesque figure of the morris-dance featured in the May-day celebrations of Shakespeare's day, which the Puritans finally succeeded in abolishing.

ashamed to show, he'll not be ashamed to tell you
its meaning.

Ophelia. You are bad, you are bad! I am going to
watch the play.

Prologue. 'For us, and for our tragedy,
Here stooping to your clemency,
We beg your hearing patiently.'

Hamlet. Is the prologue, or the inscription in a ring?

Ophelia. It is brief, my lord.

Hamlet. As woman's love.

Enter Two Players, King and Queen.

Player King. 'Full thirty times has Phoebus' chariot
gone round

Neptune's salt ocean and Tellus' orb'd ground,
And thirty dozen moons with borrowed sheen
About the world have twelve times thirty been,
Since love our hearts and Hymen did our hands
Mutually unite in most sacred bands.'

Player Queen. 'So many journeys may the sun and
moon

Make us count o'er again ere love be done!

But, woe is me! you are so ill of late,
So far from cheerfulness and your former state,
That I have anxiety about you. Yet, though I am thus,
Discomfort you, my lord, it nothing must;
For women's fear and love keep such proportion,
That either both are absent, or both extreme.

Now, what my love is, proof has made you know;
And as my love is great, my fear is so:
Where love is great, the smallest doubts are fear;
Where little fears grow great, great love must be there.'

Player King. 'Faith, I must leave thee, love, and
shortly, too;

My active powers their functions cease to do:
And thou shalt live in this fair world behind,

Honoured, beloved; and doubtless one as kind
As I for husband shalt thou'—

Player Queen. 'O, confound the rest!

Such love would have to be treason in my breast;

With second husband let me be accurst!

None wed the second but who killed the first.'

Hamlet. (Aside) Wormwood, wormwood.

Player Queen. 'The motives that to second marriage
move

Are base considerations of profit, not of love.

A second time I'll kill my husband dead

When second husband kisses me in bed.'

Player King. 'I will believe you think now what you
speak,

But what we first determine, we often break.

We keep our purpose while we remember it,

But 'tis of sudden birth, and not permanent;

Now, like unripe fruit, it clings fast to the tree,

But falls, unshaken, when it becomes mellow.

It is most inevitable that we do forget

To keep our resolves, and pay ourselves this debt;

What we to ourselves in passion do propose,

The emotion fading, makes us our purpose lose.

The violence of either grief or joys

Their own enactments with themselves destroys:

Where joys most revel, grief does most lament;

Grief turns to joy, joy grieves, upon slightest accident.

This world is not for ever, nor is it strange

That even our loves do with our fortunes change;

For it is a question left us yet to prove

Whether love leads fortune, or fortune love.

The great man o'erthrown, you note his favourite
flees;

The poor man, advanced, makes friends of enemies:

And heretofore does love on fortune depend;

For whoever needs nought shall never lack a friend,

And whoever in want a false friend does try,

Forthwith may turn him into an enemy.
But, orderly to end where I began,
Our desires and fates do so contrary run
That our plans are ever overthrown;
Our thoughts are ours, their outcomes not our own.
So do you think you will no second husband wed;
But such thoughts will die when your first lord is
dead.'

Player Queen. 'May earth not give me food, nor
heaven light!

Lock from me sport by day and repose at night!
To deep despair turn my hope and trust!
May a hermit's fare in prison be my range of joy!
Each adversary that ever blanched the face of happi-
ness

Meet what I wish well, and it destroy!
Both here and hereafter, pursue me, lasting strife!
If, being once a widow, I become again a wife.'

Hamlet. If she should break it now!

Player King. 'You have deeply sworn. Sweet one,
leave me here awhile.

My spirits grow dull, and I want to beguile
The tedious day with sleep.'

Player Queen. 'May sleep soothe thy brain;
And never may mischance come between us twain.'

Hamlet. Madam, how do you like this play?

Queen. I think the lady protests too much.

Hamlet. O, but she'll keep her word.

King. Do you know the story of the plot? There is
nothing to give offence in it?

Hamlet. No, no, they do but jest,—poison in jest;
no offence in the world.

King. What is the name of the play?

Hamlet. *The Mouse-Trap.* How is it a trap? Only
figuratively. This play is the representation of a
murder committed in Vienna. Gonzago is the
duke's name; his wife's, Baptista. You shall see

presently; it is a knavish piece of work, but what of that? Your majesty and we who have unstained souls are not touched by it. Let the chafed horse wince: our shoulders are not sore.

Enter Lucianus.

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the king.

Ophelia. You are as good as a chorus in interpreting, my lord.

Hamlet. I could interpret between your actions and your professed love, could I see who was manipulating the springs.

Ophelia. You are keen, my lord, you are keen.

Hamlet. Well, begin, murderer; pox! leave off thy damnable faces, and begin! Come: 'The croaking raven doth bellow for revenge!'

Lucianus. 'Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing;

Time a confederate and the only beholder seeing.

Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected,

With Hecate's triple curse thrice infected,

Thy natural magic and fatal property.

On wholesome life usurp immediately.'

(Pours the poison into the sleeper's ears)

Hamlet. He poisons him in the garden for his estate. His name is Gonzago; the story is in circulation, and written in choice Italian. You shall see directly how the murderer wins the love of Gonzago's wife.

Ophelia. The king rises!

Hamlet. What, frightened with false fire!

Queen. How fares my lord?

Polonius. Put an end to the play.

King. Give me some light! Away!

All. Lights, lights, lights!

(Exeunt all but Hamlet and Horatio)

Hamlet. 'Why let the stricken deer go weep,
The ungalled hart still play;
For some must watch while some must sleep:
So runs the world away.'

Would not this recitation, sir, with a whole forest of
feathers—if the rest of my fortunes change wholly
to traitors for me—with two Provincial rosettes
on my embroidered shoes, get me a place as share-
holder in any theatrical company?

Horatio. Only half a share.

Hamlet. A whole one, I say.

'For thou dost know, O Damon, dear,
This realm dismantled was
Of Jove himself; and there now reigns here
A very, very—peacock.'⁷

Horatio. You might have made it rime.

Hamlet. O, good Horatio, I'll take the Ghost's word
for a thousand pound wager. Didst perceive?

Horatio. Very well, my lord.

Hamlet. Right at the talk of poisoning?

Horatio. I did very well note him.

Hamlet. Ah, ha! Come, some music! Come, the
flageolets!

'For if the king like not the comedy,
Why, then, likely, he likes it not, par Dieu.'

Come, some music!

Re-enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Guildenstern. My good lord, vouchsafe me a word
with you.

⁷ It will be noted that in this ballad verse as in the preceding, Hamlet perpetually is contrasting the late Hamlet with Claudius. It is always "Hyperion to a satyr," "the stricken deer and the ungalled hart," "Jove to an ass" (the original rime for 'peacock.') Later, Claudius is the "mildew'd ear," etc.

Hamlet. Sir, a whole volume.

Guildestern. The king, sir,——

Hamlet. Yes, sir, what of him?

Guildestern. Is in retirement, marvellously out of temper.

Hamlet. Caused by drink, sir?

Guildestern. No, my lord, rather by anger.

Hamlet. Your wisdom would show itself of richer quality to tell this to his doctor; for, for me to put him to the cure would perhaps plunge him into far more anger.

Guildestern. My good lord, pray put your discourse into more definite form, and start not on a tangent from the affair in hand.

Hamlet. I am tame, sir; proceed.

Guildestern. The queen, your mother, in great affliction of spirit, has sent for you by me.

Hamlet. You are welcome.

Guildestern. Nay, my good lord, this courtesy is not of a true brand. If it shall please you to make a reasonable answer, I shall perform your mother's commandment; if not, your permission to go, and my return shall be the end of the business.

Hamlet. Sir, I cannot.

Guildestern. What, my lord?

Hamlet. Make you a reasonable answer; my mind's diseased: but, sir, such answer as I can make, shall be at your command; or, rather, as you say, my mother's: therefore, no more of this, but to the matter in hand at once. My mother, you say,——

Rosencrantz. Then she said this: Your behaviour has struck her with perplexity and astonishment.

Hamlet. O wonderful son, who can so astonish a mother! But is there no sequel at the heels of this mother's amazement? Impart.

Rosencrantz. She desires to speak to you in her private apartment before you go to bed.

Hamlet. We are bound to obey, were she ten times our mother. Have you any further business with me?

Rosencrantz. My lord, you once did love me.

Hamlet. So do I still, by these hands for picking and stealing.

Rosencrantz. My good lord, what is the cause of your peculiar behaviour? you surely are barring the door on your own freedom, if you fail to share your griefs with your friend.

Hamlet. Sir, I lack advancement to the throne.

Rosencrantz. How can that be, when you have the word of the king himself for your succession in Denmark.

Hamlet. Yes, sir, but you know, 'While the grass grows, the steed starves': the proverb is somewhat musty.

Re-enter Players with flageolets.

O the flageolets! Let me see one.—To tell you privately: why do you always try to get the advantage of me, as though trying to drive me into a trap?

Guildestern. O, my lord, if my duty to the queen make me seem too bold in addressing you, it is only my love that is unmannerly.

Hamlet. I do not well understand you. Will you play upon this pipe?

Guildestern. My lord, I cannot.

Hamlet. I pray you.

Guildestern. Believe me, I am not able.

Hamlet. I do beseech you.

Guildestern. I know no touch of it, my lord.

Hamlet. It is as easy as lying. Control these vents with fingers and thumb, give it breath from your mouth, and it will give forth most eloquent music. See, here are the stops.

Guildenstern. But these I cannot command to any utterance of harmony; I have not the skill.

Hamlet. Why, then look you, what an unworthy thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from the lowest note to the top of the compass: and there is much music, an excellent voice, in this little organ; yet you are unable to make it speak. God's blood! do you think I am easier than a pipe to play upon? Call me whatever instrument you will, though you can pick at me, you cannot produce harmony.

Re-enter Polonius.

God bless you, sir!

Polonius. My lord, the queen wishes to speak with you, and that immediately.

Hamlet. Do you see yonder cloud that's almost the shape of a camel?

Polonius. By the mass, 'tis like a camel, indeed.

Hamlet. I think it is like a weasel.

Polonius. It is backed like a weasel.

Hamlet. Or like a whale?

Polonius. Very like a whale.

Hamlet. Then I will come to my mother by and by.

(*Aside*) They fool me to my utmost extremity.

—I will come by and by.

Polonius. I will say so. (*Exit Polonius*)

Hamlet. 'By and by' is easily said. Leave me, friends.

(Exeunt all but Hamlet)

It is now the very witching hour of night,
When the churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes
out
Contagion on this world. Now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter deeds that the day
Would quake to behold them. Soft! now to my mother.
O heart, lose not thy natural feeling; let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom;
Let me be cruel, but not unnatural.
I will speak daggers to her, but use none;
My tongue and soul herein be hypocrites:
Howsoever by my words be she crushed,
To confirm them by action, never, my soul, consent!
(Exit)

Scene 3. A room in the castle.

Enter King, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern.

King. I do not like his actions, nor is it safe with us
To give his madness free range. Therefore, prepare
yourselves.

I will at once dispatch you with a commission,
And he shall go to England along with you.
The conditions of my authority cannot endure
Risks so imminent as do hourly grow
Out of his lunacy.

Guildenstern. We will provide ourselves;
It is a most sacred and justifiable fear
To preserve the safety of those many bodies
That are dependent on your majesty.

Rosencrantz. The individual and private life is duty
bound
With all the strength and armour of the mind

To protect itself from injury, but much more so
 That person upon whose welfare depends
 The lives of many. The decease of a king
 Is not to itself alone, but like a maelstrom it doth draw
 Whatever is near it with it. It is a massive wheel,
 Fixed on the summit of the highest mountain,
 To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
 Are firmly adjoined and united; which, when it falls,
 Each small attachment, petty consequence,
 Attends the deafening ruin. Never alone
 Does a king sigh, but his whole kingdom with him.
King. Provide yourselves, I pray you, for this hasty

voyage;

For we shall now put fetters on this fear,
 Which now goes about too free-footed.

Guildenstern. }
Rosencrantz. }

We will make haste.

(Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern)
Enter Polonius.

Polonius. My lord, he's going to his mother's apartment.

Behind the wall-curtain I shall secrete myself,
 To hear the proceeding; I'll guarantee she'll roundly
 reprove him:

And, as you said, and wisely was it said,
 'Tis fitting that more audience than his mother,
 Since nature makes them partial, should overhear
 This speech from a post of vantage. Farewell, my
 liege;

I'll call upon you before you go to bed,
 And tell you what I learn.

King. Thanks, dear lord. *(Exit Polonius)*

O my offence is rank; it smells to heaven;
 It has the first and oldest curse upon it,
 A brother's murder! I cannot pray;

Though inclination is almost as strong as will,
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
And, like a man to a twofold duty bound,
I hesitate where I shall first begin,
And neglect both. What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? ⁸ What is the service of
mercy

But to confront sin, and forgive it?
And what's in prayer but this twofold force,
To be prevented from the act of falling,
Or pardoned, having fallen? ⁹ Then I'll look up;
My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer
Can serve my purpose? 'Forgive me my foul murder?'
That cannot be; since I still possess
Those benefits for which I committed the murder,
My crown, my ambitions realized, and my queen.
Can one be pardoned and yet retain the benefits of
the offence?

In the corruptible courses of this world
A rich offender's hand may shove justice by;
And often it is seen that the guilty gains
Buy out the law; but 'tis not so above;
There is no shuffling; there the deed lies
Revealed in its true nature, and we ourselves are
compelled,

Face to face with our faults,
To give in evidence. What then? what remains?
Try what repentance can do. What can it not do?
Yet what can it do when one cannot repent?
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
O ensnared soul, that, struggling to be free,
Art only more entangled. Help, angels! Make the
effort!

⁸ See Psalm 51: 7; Isaiah 1: 18.

⁹ See Matt. 6: 13; Luke 11: 4.

Bow, stubborn knees, and, heart, with strings of steel,
Become soft as the sinews of the new-born babe!
All may be well. (*Retires and kneels*)

Enter Hamlet.

Hamlet. Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
And now I'll do it. And so he goes to heaven;
And so I am revenged. That demands scrutiny.
A villain kills my father; and for that deed,
I, his only son, do this same villain send
To heaven.

O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
He took my father unshriven, unfasting,
With all his sins unexpiated, in life's full spring;
And how his record stands who knows, save heaven?
But from our human standpoint and course of thought,
His reckoning is heavy; and am I then revenged
By taking him, his soul cleansed by confession,
When he is fit and prepared for his passage?
No!

Up, sword; await more terrible occasion;
When he is in a drunken stupor, or in a rage,
Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed;
At gambling, swearing, or engaged in act
That has no taste of salvation to it,—
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damned and black
As hell, whereto it goes. My mother is waiting.
This purging by prayer only prolongs thy sickness.

(*Exit*)

King. (Rising) My words fly up, my thoughts remain below;

Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

(*Exit*)

*Scene 4. The Queen's apartment.**Enter Queen and Polonius.*

Polonius. He will come at once. See that you severely reprove him;
Let him know his pranks have been too unrestrained to be borne with,
And that your grace has screened and stood between Much royal anger and him. I'll stop at this point.
Pray you, be severe with him.

Hamlet. (Within) Mother, mother, mother!

Queen. I warrant you I will;
Do not fear that. Withdraw, I hear him coming.

*(Polonius hides behind wall-curtain)**Enter Hamlet.*

Hamlet. How now, mother, what's the matter?

Queen. Hamlet, you have your father much offended.

Hamlet. Mother, you have my father much offended.

Queen. Come, come, you answer with a frivolous tongue.

Hamlet. Go, go, you talk with a wicked tongue.

Queen. Why, how now, Hamlet?

Hamlet. What's the matter now?

Queen. Have you forgotten me?

Hamlet. No, by the cross, not so:
You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife;
And—would it were not so—you are my mother.

Queen. Nay, then, I'll set those to you that can speak.

Hamlet. Come, come, and sit down; you shall not budge:

You shall not go till I set up before you a mirror
In which you may see the inmost parts of you.

Queen. What will you do? you will not murder me?

Help, help, ho!

Polonius. (*Behind*) What, ho! help, help, help!

Hamlet. (*Drawing his rapier*) How now! a rat?

Dead, I'll wager a ducat, dead!

(*Makes a pass through the wall-curtain*)

Polonius. (*Behind*) O, I am slain! (*Falls and dies*)

Queen. O me! what have you done?

Hamlet. I do not know;

Is it the king?

Queen. O, what a rash and bloody deed this is!

Hamlet. A bloody deed! almost as bad, good mother,
As to kill a king, and marry with his brother.

Queen. As kill a king!

Hamlet. Yes, lady, that was my word.

(*Lifts up the wall-curtain and discovers Polonius*)

Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!

I mistook thee for thy superior; accept thy fate;

Thou hast found to be meddlesome is perilous.

Leave off the wringing of your hands! Peace! sit you
down,

And let me wring your heart: for I shall do so

If it be made of penetrable stuff;

If damned custom have not made it so like brass

That it is impenetrable and incapable of feeling.

Queen. What have I done, that thou dar'st wag thy
tongue

In noise so rudely against me?

Hamlet. Such an act

That it blurs the grace and blush of modesty,

Calls virtue a hypocrite, takes the rose

From the fair forehead of an innocent love,

And puts there the harlot's brand, makes marriage-
vows

As false as dicers' oaths; O, such a deed
As from the marriage-contract tears out
Its inner spirit, and sweet religion makes
A mere conglomeration of words! heaven's face doth
burn,

Yea, this most solid, compact earth,
With visage pallid as near to doomsday,
Is sick at its very thought.

Queen. Indeed, what act,

That roars so loud and thunders in the prologue?

Hamlet. Look here, upon this picture, then on this,

The portrayed representation of two brothers.

See what natural grace was on this brow;

Hyperion's curls; the brow of Jove himself,

An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;

An upright attitude like the herald Mercury

Newly alighted on a heaven-kissing hill;

A combination and a form indeed,

Whereon each god did seem to set his seal

To give the world assurance of a man.

This was your husband. Look you now what follows:

Here is your husband; like a mildewed ear of grain,

Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?

Could you leave feeding on this fair mountain,

And fatten on this moor? Ha! have you eyes?

You cannot call it love, for at your age

The hey-day in the blood is tame, subdued,

And leans more on the judgment; and what judgment

Would wish to step from this to this? Feeling, surely,

you possess,

Or else you could not have the power of motion; but

surely that feeling

Is paralyzed; for madness would not so err,

And sense to insanity was never so enslaved,

But that it retained some power of discrimination,

In such a striking difference. What devil was it

That thus has cheated you in playing blind-man's-buff?

Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
Ears minus hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
Or but a diseased fraction of one true sense
Could not possibly be so stupid.

O shame! where is thy blush? Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutiny in a matron's bones,
To flaming youth let virtue become as wax,
And melt in her own fire; proclaim no shame
When compelling ardour stimulates impulse,
Since frosty age itself as actively doth burn,
And reason gives way to appetite.

Queen. O Hamlet, speak no more!
You have turned my eyes into my very soul,
And there I behold such black and ingrained spots
That will never lose their stain.

Hamlet. Nay, but to live
Stewed into filth,——

Queen. O speak to me no more!
These words, like daggers, stick into my ears.
No more, sweet Hamlet!

Hamlet. A murderer and a villain;
A slave who is not a twentieth part the tithe
Of your preceding husband; a buffoon of a king;
A purse-snatcher of the empire and the rule,
Who from a shelf the precious diadem stole,
And put it in his pocket!

Queen. No more!

Hamlet. A king fit for the clown's motley,——

Enter Ghost.

Save me, and hover over me with your wings,
You heavenly guardians! What would your gracious
person?

Queen. Alas, he's mad!

Hamlet. Do you not come your tardy son to chide,

Who, letting both time and impulse lapse, allows to pass
The important acting of your dread command?

O, tell me!

Ghost. Do not forget. This visitation
Is but to sharpen thy almost blunted purpose.
But, look, bewilderment on thy mother sits;
O, step between her and her struggling soul!
Imagination in weakest bodies strongest works.
Speak to her, Hamlet.

Hamlet. How is it with you, lady?

Queen. Alas, how is it with you,
That you bend your vision on vacancy,
And with immaterial air hold discourse?
Forth at your eyes your spirit wildly gleams;
And, like sleeping soldiers at a night alarm,
Your recumbent hair, like life in excrescences,
Starts up and stands on end. O noble son,
Upon the heat and flame of thy indisposition
Sprinkle cool patience. On what are you looking?

Hamlet. On him, on him! Look, how pale he glares!
His appearance and cause together, preaching to stones,
Would make them capable of feeling.¹⁰ Do not look
at me thus;

Lest with this piteous expression you change
My stern intentions. Then I shall shed drops
Of the wrong colour: tears, instead of blood.

Queen. To whom do you speak these words?

Hamlet. Do you see nothing there?

Queen. Nothing at all; yet I see all that is there.

Hamlet. Did you nothing hear?

Queen. No, nothing but ourselves.

Hamlet. Why, look there! see how it steals away!
My father, clothed as when alive!
Look where he is going, even now, out at the portal!

¹⁰ Compare Matt. 3: 9; Luke 3: 8 and 19: 40; also *Macbeth*, II-i-57, 58.

(Exit Ghost)

Queen. This is only the creation of your brain;
These bodiless phantoms insanity
Is very cunning in embodying.

Hamlet. Insanity!
My pulse, like yours, temperately keeps time,
And makes as healthful a rhythm. It is not madness
That I have uttered; bring me to the test,
And I will repeat the substance word for word, which
madness

Would leap aside from. Mother, for the love of grace,
Lay not that soothing ointment on your soul,
That not your sin but that my madness speaks;
It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
While foul corruption, mining underneath,
Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven;
Repent what's past, avoid what may come later;
Do not spread dung upon the weeds,
To make them ranker. Forgive my compelled candour;
For in the grossness of these bloated times
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,—
Yes, bow and ask for leave to do it good.

Queen. O Hamlet, you have broken my heart in twain.

Hamlet. O, throw away the worse half of it,
And with the other half live purer.
Good night: but go not to my uncle's bed;
Assume some virtue, if you really possess it not.
That monster, Custom, who our moral sense does eat,
The evil genius of bad habits, is an angel yet in this,
That to the custom of habits fair and good,
He likewise gives us ease in adopting the outer garment
Of good as well as bad. Refrain thus tonight,
And that will lend a kind of ease
To the next abstinence; the next more easy still;
For habit can almost uproot inherent nature,
And either overcome the devil or cast him out

With wondrous potency. Once more, good night;
And when you kneel for blessing,
Then I will blessing beg from you. As for this same
lord, (*Pointing to Polonius*)

I do repent; but heaven has so pleased it,
To punish me as instrument of his death, and him
through me,

In making me its scourge and minister.
I will dispose of him, and will well account for
The death I gave him. So, again, good night.
I have been cruel to you, only to be kind;
Else bad begins, and worse remains behind.
One word more, good lady.

Queen.

What shall I do?

Hamlet. Not this, by any means, that I am bidding
you do:

Let the bloated king tempt you again to bed,
Pinch wantonly your cheek, call you his mouse;
And let him, for a couple of reeking kisses,
Or by fondling your neck with his damned fingers,
Make you disclose this whole affair,
That I am not really mad,
But only very crafty. It were good you let him know;
For who except a queen, fair, sober, wise,
Would from a toad, a bat, a tom-cat,
Such intimate concerns hide? who would do so?

No, in spite of good sense and secrecy,
Unloose the basket on the house's top,
Let the birds fly, and, like the famous ape,
To try the experiment of creeping in the basket,
Leaping after them, and so break your own neck down.

Queen. Be assured that if words are made of breath,
And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
What you have said to me.

Hamlet. I must go to England; do you know that?

Queen.

Alas,

I had forgotten; it is so decided.

Hamlet. There are letters sealed; and my two school-mates,
Whom I will trust as I will adders fanged,
Bear the mandate; they must prepare the way
That leads into the knavish plot laid for me; let it work;
For it is the best sport to have the bomb-thrower
Blown up by his own bomb; and it shall go hard,
But I will go a yard deeper than the mines,
And blow them toward the moon. 'Tis sweet indeed,
When in one direction two crafts directly collide!
This dead man shall speed my departure.
I'll lug the carcass into the next room.
Mother, good night. Indeed, this counsellor
Is now most still, most secretive, and most grave,
Who was, in life, a foolish, prating knave.
Come, sir,—to have an end of you and your speeches.
Good night, mother.

(Exeunt individually; Hamlet dragging Polonius' body.)

ACT IV

Scene I. A room in the castle.

Enter King, Queen, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern.

King. There's something significant in these sighs;
these deep breathings

You must translate into meaning; it is fit that we
understand them.

Where is your son?

Queen. Give up this place to us a little while.

(Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern)

Ah, my good lord, what have I seen this night!

King. What, Gertrude? How is Hamlet?

Queen. Mad as the sea and wind, when both contend
To determine which is mightier;¹ in an ungoverned fit,
Behind the wall-curtain hearing something stir,
He whips out rapier, cries 'A rat, a rat!'
And in this unfounded apprehension, kills
The unseen good old man.

King. O heavy deed!

It had been so with me, had I been there;

His liberty is full of threats to all,

To you yourself, to us, to every one.

Alas, how shall this bloody act be explained?

It will be laid upon us, whose foresight

Should have kept controlled, restrained, and out of
society,

¹ "The Queen both follows her son's injunction in keeping up the belief in his madness, and, with maternal ingenuity, makes the excuse for his rash deed" (Clarke).

This mad young man ; but so great was our love,
 We refused to admit what measures were most fitting,
 And like the victim of a foul disease,
 To prevent its becoming known, let it feed
 Even on the pith of life. Where has he gone?
Queen. To draw away the body he has killed;
 And over him his very madness, like some precious ore
 In a mine of metals base,
 Shows itself pure. He weeps for what he has done.²
King. O Gertrude, come away!
 When sunrise touches the mountain-peaks
 We shall deport him hence; and this foul deed
 We must, with all the majesty and skill we can
 summon,
 Both countenance and excuse. Ho, Guildenstern!

Re-enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Friends both, find others to assist you,—
 Hamlet in his madness has slain Polonius,
 And has dragged the body from his mother's apart-
 ment,—
 Go search him out; speak gently to him, and bring the
 body
 Into the chapel. I pray you, hasten.

(Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern)

Come, Gertrude, we'll summon our wisest friends,
 And let them know both what we mean to do,
 And what has been untimely done; in order, perchance,
 that slander,
 Whose whisper to the limits of the world,
 As level as the cannon to the target-eye,

² "Either this is an entire invention of the Queen, or Hamlet's mockeries had been succeeded by sorrow" (Moberly). We think the latter.

Transports his deadly shot, may miss our name,
And hit the invulnerable air. O, come away!
My soul is filled with discord and dismay.

(Exeunt)

Scene 2. Another room in the castle.

Enter Hamlet.

Hamlet. He's safely stowed away.

Rosencrantz. } *(Within)* Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!
Guildestern. }

Hamlet. But, hush, what noise is that? Who calls on
Hamlet? O, here they come.

Enter Rosencrantz and Guildestern.

Rosencrantz. What have you done, my lord, with the
dead body?

Hamlet. Compounded it back to dust, to which it was
kin.

Rosencrantz. Tell us where it is, that we may convey
it thence

And carry it into the chapel.

Hamlet. Do not believe it.

Rosencrantz. Believe what?

Hamlet. That I must take your advice and not my
own. Besides, when questioned by a sponge, what
reply should be made by the son of a king?

Rosencrantz. Do you take me for a sponge, my lord?

Hamlet. Yes, sir; one that soaks up the king's
favours, his rewards, and his authorities. But
such officials do the king best service in the long
run. He keeps them like an ape does nuts, in the

corner of his jaw; first to be mouthed, and finally swallowed. When he needs what information you have gathered, it is merely a matter of squeezing you, and, sponge, you shall be dry again.

Rosencrantz. I do not understand you, my lord.

Hamlet. I am glad of it; a cunning remark is lost in the ear of a fool.

Rosencrantz. My lord, you must tell us where the body is, and go in with us to the king.

Hamlet. The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body.³ The king is a thing,—

Guildenstern. A thing, my lord!

Hamlet. Of no account. Hide fox, and all after.⁴

Scene 3. Another room in the castle.

Enter King, with Attendants.

King. I have sent in search of him, and to find the body.

How dangerous it is that this man goes loose!

Yet we must not enforce the severe laws against him:

He's loved by the unthinking multitudes,

Who judge not by reason, but by outward appearance;

And, where it is thus, the offender's punishment is weighed in detail,

But never the gravity of his offence. To carry all smoothly and evenly,

This precipitate sending him away must seem

A long-considered arrangement; diseases grown desperate

³ This is probably mere nonsense, but the *Variorum* records interpretations by scholars who deem it sense. A plausible example is: "The body (of responsibility for the murder) lies ultimately with the king, but the king is not with the corpse (as he ought to be)" (Lionel W. Lyde, Glasgow Academy).

⁴ A plausible equivalent given by Lyde for this line is: "When the old fox is hidden, all must set off to find him."

Are only relieved by desperate remedies,
Or not at all.

Enter Rosencrantz.

How now! what has happened?

Rosencrantz. Where the dead body has been concealed, my lord,

We cannot learn from him.

King. But where is he?

Rosencrantz. Just without, my lord; guarded, awaiting your pleasure.

King. Bring him before me.

Rosencrantz. Ho, Guildenstern! bring in my lord.

Enter Hamlet, and Guildenstern.

King. Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

Hamlet. At supper.

King. At supper! where?

Hamlet. Not where he does the eating, but where he is being eaten; a certain convocation of worms which eat politicians are now at him. Your worm is the only emperor in diet; we fatten all other creatures to fatten ourselves, and we fatten ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but varying service, two dishes, but for only one table; that's the end.

King. Alas, alas!

Hamlet. A man may fish with a worm that has eaten of a king, and then eat the fish that ate that worm.

King. What do you mean by this?

Hamlet. Nothing, except to show you how a king may make a journey of state through the guts of a beggar.

King. Where is Polonius?

Hamlet. In heaven. Send there to see: if your messenger does not find him there, seek him in the

other place yourself. But, indeed, if you do not find him within the present month, you may nose him as you go upstairs into the lobby.

King. Go seek him there. (*To some Attendants*)

Hamlet. He'll stay there till you come.

(*Exeunt Attendants*)

King. Hamlet, this deed, for your particular safety, Which we do cherish, as we sorely grieve For what you have done, makes it necessary to send you hence

With hot haste; therefore, prepare yourself.

The boat is ready, and the wind favourable,
Your companions attend, and everything is bent
Toward England.

Hamlet. To England?

King. Yes, Hamlet.

Hamlet. Good.

King. So it is, if you appreciate our purpose.

Hamlet. I see a cherub who sees it. But, come: to England! Farewell, dear mother.

King. And thy loving father, Hamlet.

Hamlet. My mother only: father and mother are man and wife; man and wife are one flesh; and hence, my mother. Come, away to England! (*Exit*)

King. Follow at his heels; tempt him aboard with speed;

Do not delay; I must have him away from here to-night.

Away! for everything else is sealed and done
That depends on this affair; I pray, make haste.

(*Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*)

And thou, sovereign of England, if my good will thou valu'st at all,—

For my supremacy over thee may well make thee cognizant,

Since the scar yet looks red and raw
Inflicted by the Danish sword, and thy awe
Pays free homage to us,—thou mayst not indifferently
regard .
My royal mandate; the full import of which is,
By letters earnestly entreating
The immediate death of Hamlet. Do it, England;
For, like the fever, in my blood he rages,
And thou must cure me. Until I know 'tis done,
Whatever my chances for happiness, my joys have not
begun. *(Exit)*

Scene 4. A plain in Denmark.

Enter Fortinbras, a Captain, and Soldiers, marching.

Fortinbras. Go, captain, greet the Danish king for
me;
Tell him that by his official permission Fortinbras
Claims the escort of the promised right of way
Over his kingdom. You already know the place of
meeting.
If it should be that his majesty desires to interview me,
I shall be glad to pay respect in person;
And tell him so.
Captain. I will do it, my lord.
Fortinbras. March slowly on.

(Exeunt Fortinbras and Soldiers)

Enter Hamlet, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and others.

Hamlet. Good sir, whose forces are these?
Captain. They are from Norway, sir.
Hamlet. Having what destination, sir, I pray you?
Captain. Against some part of Poland.

Hamlet. Who commands them, sir?

Captain. The nephew of the aged king of Norway,—
Fortinbras.

Hamlet. Do they go against the main body of Poland,
sir,

Or merely some frontier?

Captain. To tell the truth without any addition,
We go to gain a little patch of ground
That has in itself no value save in name.
For a rental of only five ducats I would not lease it;
Nor will it yield to Norway or to Poland
A greater price, should it be sold into absolute possession.

Hamlet. Why, then, the Poles will never defend it.

Captain. Yes, for it already is garrisoned.

Hamlet. Two thousand souls and twenty thousand
ducats

Will not settle the question of this straw;
This is the hidden abscess of much wealth and peace,
Which, breaking inwardly, shows no cause without
Why the man dies. I humbly thank you, sir.

Captain. Good-bye, sir. (*Exit*)

Rosencrantz. Is it your pleasure now to go, my lord?

Hamlet. I'll be with you directly. Go on, a little
ahead. (*Exeunt all but Hamlet*)

How every occasion points the accusing finger,
To spur my dull revenge! What is a man
If his chief good and the way he employs his time
Is but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.⁵
Surely He who made us with such latitude of reason,
To review the past and anticipate the future,
Gave us not that capability and godlike power
To moulder in us unused. Now, whether it be

⁵ "For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?"

—Tennyson, *The Passing of Arthur*, ll. 41

The beast's forgetfulness, or some cowardly scruple
From thinking too precisely about affairs,—
A thought, which, quartered, has but one part wisdom
And always three parts cowardice,—I know not
Why yet I live to say 'This thing's still to be done,'
Since I have cause enough, and will, and strength, and
means

To do it. Examples as coarse as earth exhort me;
Witness this army of great size and cost,
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit by divine ambition inspired,
Disregards the uncertain outcome,
Exposing all that is mortal and unsure
For all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Only for an egg-shell.⁶ Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great cause,
But to find no provocation too small
When honour is at stake. What is my standing, then,
Who have a father killed, a mother stained,
Things to excite both reason and emotion,
And allow everything to sleep? while to my shame I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
Who for the trifle and toy of reputation
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot of ground
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not of sufficient area
To hide the slain?⁷ O, from this time forth
Let my thoughts be bloody, or nothing worth!

⁶ "Fortinbras, marching to the drum, to win a dunghill" (John Masfield).

⁷ The introduction of Fortinbras serves the double function in the drama of (1) throwing the character of Hamlet, who thought only of the unseen empire of spirit rather than worldly empire, into sharp relief; (2) having a person of royal lineage take charge of the affairs of Denmark at the end of the play.

Scene 5. Elsinore. A room in the castle.

Enter Queen, Horatio, and a Gentleman.

Queen. I will not speak with her.

Gentleman. She is greatly troubled, indeed, distracted;
Her moods must greatly be pitied.

Queen. What would she have?

Gentleman. She speaks much of her father; says she
hears

There are tricks in the world; and hems, and beats
at her heart;

Kicks spitefully at trifles; speaks things of uncertain
import,

That make but half sense: her talking is quite empty,
Yet her confused use of language moves

The hearers to draw conclusions; they guess at its
meaning,

And patch up the words to fit in their own thoughts;
Which, as her winks and nods and gestures furnish
them,

Indeed would make one think there might be inferred,
Though nothing certainly, yet much of misfortune.

Horatio. It would be well if she were spoken with;
for she may strew

Dangerous conjectures in mischief-hatching minds.

Queen. Let her come in. (*Exit Gentleman*)

(*Aside*) To my sick soul, true to sin's real nature,
Each trifle seems but the prologue to some great
disaster;

So full of ignorant suspicion is guilt,
It betrays itself in seeking to prevent betrayal.

Re-enter Gentleman, with Ophelia.

Ophelia. Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?

Queen. How now, Ophelia!

Ophelia. (*Sings*)
'How should I your true-love know
From another such one?
By his cockle hat and staff,
And sandal shoes.'⁸

Queen. Alas, sweet lady, what is the meaning of this song?

Ophelia. What say you? nay, I pray you, listen.
(*Sings*)

'He is dead and gone, lady,
And is dead and gone;
At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels, a stone.'

O, ho!

Queen. Nay, but, Ophelia,——

Ophelia. I pray you, listen.
(*Sings*)

'White was his shroud as mountain snow,'——

Enter King.

Queen. Alas, look here, my lord.

Ophelia. (*Sings*)
'Bedecked with sweet flowers;
Which, with weeping, to the grave did not go,
With true love-showers.'

King. How do you do, pretty lady?

Ophelia. Well, God reward you! They say the owl
was at first a baker's daughter. Lord, we know
what we are, but know not what we may become.
God be at your table!

⁸ As is often the case, insanity talks in the language revealing the original cause or causes of the mental collapse. Ophelia's first verse concerns Hamlet; the second, Polonius. The cockle-hat was the sign that a pilgrim wearing it had been overseas.

⁹ often used as a disguise by lovers. It may refer to Hamlet to England.

King. Fancies about her father.

Ophelia. I pray you, let's have no words about this;
but when they ask you what it means, say you this:
(*Sings*)

'Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's day,
All early in the morning,
I a maiden at your window will be,
To be your Valentine.'

King. How long has she been in this state?

Ophelia. I hope all will be well. We must be patient;
but I cannot choose but weep, to think how they
should lay him so, in the cold ground. My brother
shall know about it; and so I thank you for your
good advice. Come, my coach! Good night, ladies;
good night, sweet ladies; good night, good night.

(*Exit*)

King. Follow her closely; keep close watch upon her,
I pray you.

(*Exit Horatio*)

O this is the poison of deep grief; it all springs
From her father's death. O Gertrude, Gertrude,
When sorrows come, they come not individually,
But in battalions! First, her father slain;
Next your son gone; and he the violent author
Of his own removal: the people disturbed,
Thick and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers,
About good Polonius' death; and we have done but
foolishly,

In precipitate haste to inter him; poor Ophelia,
Her mind separated from her true self,
Without the which we are only pictures, or else beasts;
Last of all, and worse than all these,
Her brother has in secret arrived from France,
Broods over these strange happenings, is reserved in
his conduct,
And does not lack talebearers to infect his

With distorted accounts of his father's death,
And, necessarily, not fully informed,
They will not scruple to arraign me
To whosoever will listen. O my dear Gertrude, this,
Like a scattering-cannon, in many places
Metes out to me possibilities of death.

(Noise within)

Queen. Alas, what noise is that?

King. Where are my Swiss guards? Let them guard
the door.

Enter another Gentleman.

What is the matter?

Gentleman. Save yourself, my lord;
The ocean, overflowing its boundaries,
Devours the shallows with not more impetuous haste
Than young Laertes, with a riotous armed force,
Overbears your officers. The rabble call him lord;
And, as if the world's existence had just begun,
Antiquity forgotten, custom not known,
The ratifiers and support of any catchword,
They cry, 'Let us choose; Laertes shall be king!'
Caps, hands, and tongues applaud it to the clouds,
'Laertes shall be king, Laertes king!'⁹

Queen. How cheerfully on the false trail they cry!
You are on a false scent, you Danish dogs!

⁹ Compare this with *Julius Caesar*, III, ii, l. 52, where, during Antony's funeral oration, the Third Citizen shouts: "Let him be Caesar." Such passages as these and the line a little later in this scene in *Hamlet*: "There's such divinity doth hedge a King," shows Shakespeare to have been a conservative in politics, probably never anticipating the possibilities of successful democracy. For this, in part, no doubt, H. G. Wells excludes the plays of Shakespeare from his proposed "Bible of Civilization." See *The Salvaging of Civilization*, by H. G. Wells (Macmillan, 1921), or *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 30, 1921, pp. 14, 15, for the Wells verdict.

(*Noise within*)

King. They have crashed in the doors.

Enter Laertes, with drawn sword; Danes following.

Laertes. Where is this king? Sirs, stand you all without.

Danes. No, let us come in.

Laertes. I pray you, give me leave.

Danes. We will, we will. (*They retire outside*)

Laertes. I thank you; guard the door. O thou vile king,

Give me back my father!

Queen. Calmly, good Laertes. (*Laying hold of him*)

Laertes. Any drop of blood that's calm proclaims me a bastard,

Calls my father adulterer, and puts the harlot's brand
Even here, between the chaste, unsullied brows
Of my pure mother.

King. What's the reason, Laertes,
That thy rebellion looks so giant-like?

Let him go, Gertrude; fear not for my safety.

There's such divinity doth hedge a king

That treason can but peep at what it would do,

And cannot act out its will. Tell me, Laertes,

Why thou art thus enraged. Let him go, Gertrude.

Speak, man.

Laertes. Where's my father?

King. Dead.

Queen. But not at his hand.

King. Let him demand his fill.

Laertes. How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with.
To hell, allegiance! vows, to the blackest devil!¹⁰

¹⁰ "Laertes is a boor who destroys intellect" (John Masefield). The character of Laertes, like that of Fortinbras, serves to throw that of Hamlet into sharp relief. Both have fathers to

Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!
I dare damnation. On this position I stand,
That for this world or the next I care not,¹¹
Let come what may; only, I'll be revenged
Most thoroughly for my father.

King. Who shall prevent you?

Laertes. Only my own will, nothing else in the world;
And, as for my means, I'll husband them so well
That they shall go far with little.

King. Good Laertes,
If you desire to know the facts
Of your dear father's death, is it included in your
revenge,
That with one grand sweep you will draw into it both
friend and foe,
Winner and loser?

Laertes. None but his enemies.

King. Do you wish to know them, then?

Laertes. To his good friends thus I'll open wide my
arms,
And, like the kind life-giving pelican,
Feed them with my own blood.

King. Why, now you are speaking
Like a good child and a true gentleman.
That I am absolutely guiltless of your father's death,
And am most keenly touched with grief by it,
Shall penetrate your judgment as straight
As light does your eye.

revenge, and Laertes flings himself into headlong action, while Hamlet is extremely slow to act. But the contrast lies far deeper than this, as Masefield's trenchant remark implies. Laertes represents the superficial, reckless, irreverent type of mind, while Hamlet's mind is profound. Superficiality and reckless profanity are usually twins. Laertes has the spiritual sleeping-sickness. Hamlet is governed only by the finest of ethical motives in seeking the proper course of his revenge. For this reason critics are often misled in their estimates of Hamlet's true character.

¹¹ Compare *Macbeth*, III, ii, l. 16; also I, vii, ll. 5, 6.

Danes. (*Within*) Let her come in.

Laertes. How now! What noise is that?

Re-enter Ophelia.

O heat, dry up my brains! tears seven times salty
Burn out the sense and faculty of my eyes!
By heaven, thy madness shall be paid by weight,
Till the scale turns the beam. O rose of May!
Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia!
O heavens! is it possible that a young maid's wits
Should be as mortal as an old man's life?
Nature is tender in love, and where 'tis tender
It sends some precious token of itself
Into the grave of that which it loves.

Ophelia. (*Sings*)

'They bore him barefaced on the bier;
Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny;
And in his grave rained many a tear.'

Fare you well, my dove!

Laertes. Had you your wits and could persuade me
to revenge,

It could not move me like this.

Ophelia. You must sing, 'Down a-down, and you call
him a-down-a'. Oh-h-h-h, how well the song goes
to the spinning-wheel's motion! It was a false
steward that stole his master's daughter.

Laertes. These meaningless words are more moving
than had they meaning.

Ophelia. There's rosemary,¹² that's for remembrance;

¹² Rosemary comes from two Latin words, "ros marinus", meaning sea-foam, and is in nowise a combination of rose and Mary. Ophelia gives Laertes rosemary and pansies (French: "pensées", 'thoughts') for remembrance. Fennel ('flattery') and columbine ('ingratitude') are given to the king. Rue ('grief and repentance') appropriately is given to Gertrude. "With a difference" means that Ophelia wears it to symbolize the former and Gertrude the latter.

pray you, love, remember; and there are pansies,
that's for thoughts.

Laertes. Precepts coming out of madness; thoughts
and remembrance fitted.

Ophelia. There's fennel for you, and columbines;
there's rue for you, and here's some for me; we
may call it herb of grace on Sundays. O, you must
wear your rue with a different meaning. There's
a daisy. I would have given you some violets,
but they all withered when my father died. They
say he made a good end,—

(Sings) 'For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy.'

Laertes. Grief and affliction, suffering, even hell itself
She can transform into beauty and charm.

Ophelia. *(Sings)*

'And will he not come again?

And will he not come again?

No, no, he is dead,

Go to thy death-bed;

He will never come again.

His beard was as white as snow,

All flaxen was his head;

He is gone, he is gone,

And we cast away moan:

God have mercy on his soul!

And on all Christian souls, I pray God. God be with
you. *(Exit)*

Laertes. Do you see this, O God?

King. Laertes, I must share your grief,

Or you will deny me the right. Go but apart,

Choose of your wisest friends whomsoever you will,

And they shall hear and judge between you and me.

If by direct or indirect hand

They find me implicated, we shall our kingdom give,

Our crown, our life, and all that we call ours,

To you in satisfaction; but if not,

But be content to lend your patience to me,
And I shall be co-worker with your soul
To give it due satisfaction.

Laertes. Let it be so;
The means by which he died, his obscure burial,—
No trophy, sword, or escutcheon o'er his bones,
No rite of nobility or formal ceremony,—
These cry to be heard, as 'twere from heaven to earth,
So that I must call it in question.

King. And so you shall;
And where the guilt is, let the great axe fall.
I pray you, come with me. (*Exeunt*)

Scene 6. Another room in the castle.

Enter Horatio and a Servant.

Horatio. Who is it that wishes to speak to me?

Servant. Sailors, sir; they say that they have letters
for you.

Horatio. Let them come in. (*Exit Servant*)
I do not know from what part of the world
I could be greeted, unless from Lord Hamlet.

Enter Sailors.

1 Sailor. God bless you, sir.

Horatio. May he bless thee, too.

1 Sailor. He shall, sir, if it so please Him. There's
a letter for you, sir,—it comes from the ambassa-
dor that was bound for England,—if your name
be Horatio, as I am let to know it is.

Horatio. (*Reads*) 'Horatio, when you shall have
looked through this letter, give these fellows some
means of access to the king; they have letters also
for him. Before we were two days out at sea, a

pirate vessel of very warlike equipment gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we had to put on an enforced valour. In the grapple I boarded her. At that very instant they got clear of our ship, so that I alone became their prisoner. They have dealt with me like merciful thieves: but they were aware of what they did; I am to do a good turn to them. Let the king have the letters I have sent, and you hasten to me with as much speed as you would flee from death. I have words to speak in your ear that will strike you dumb, and yet they are almost incapable of expressing the seriousness of the matter. These good fellows will conduct you to where I am abiding. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern still hold their course toward England; of them I have much to tell you. Farewell. He whom you know to be yours,
HAMLET.'

Come, I shall give you conduct for these your letters,
And shall do it all the speedier, so that you may direct
me
To him from whom you brought them.

Scene 7. Another room in the castle.

Enter King and Laertes.

King. Now your knowledge of the affair must fully
acquit me,
And you must put me down in your heart as a friend,
Since you have heard, and with a comprehending ear,
That he who did your noble father slay,
Was pursuing my life.

Laertes. So it clearly appears. But tell me,
Why did you not proceed against these deeds,
So criminal and life-destroying in their nature,

Since by your desire for safety, wisdom, and all things else,

You were greatly wrought up.

King. O, for two particular reasons,
Which may to you, perhaps, seem very weak,
But yet to me were strong. The queen, his mother,
Lives almost by his presence; and as for myself,—
My virtue or my curse, whichever it may be,—
She's so closely bound up with my life and soul
That, as a star which moves not but in fixed orbit,
I could not, save through her direction. The other
motive, —

Why to a public account I could not call him,—
Is the great love the common people bear him;
Who, dipping all his faults in their affection,
Would, like the spring of petrifying waters,
Transform his fetters to ornaments; so that my arrows,
Of too light timber for so strong a wind,
Would have reverted to my bow again,
And not gone where I aimed them.

Laertes. And thus I have a noble father lost,
A sister driven into a state of madness,
Whose worth, if I may praise what was,
Made her conspicuous above all rivals
For her perfection. But my revenge will come.

King. Do not lose sleep on that account. You must
not think

That I am made of stuff so flat and dull
That I shall let my beard be shaken by danger
And look on it as pastime. You shortly shall hear
more.

I loved your father, and I love also myself,
And that, I hope, will teach you to imagine,—

Enter a Messenger, with letters.

How now! what news?

Messenger. Letters, my lord, from Hamlet:

This to your majesty; this to the queen.

King. From Hamlet! Who brought them?

Messenger. Sailors, my lord, they say; I did not see them:

They were given to me by Claudio; he took them
From him who brought them.

King. Laertes, you shall hear them.
Leave us.

(*Reads*) 'High and mighty: You shall know by this
that I am set naked on your kingdom. Tomorrow
I shall beg leave to stand in your royal presence,
when I shall, first asking your pardon for it, re-
count the occasion of my sudden and stranger
than sudden, return. HAMLET.'

What does this mean? Have all the rest come back?
Or is it some delusion, and not what it seems?

Laertes. Do you know the hand?

King. 'Tis Hamlet's handwriting. 'Naked!'

And in a postscript here he says 'alone.'

Can you enlighten me?

Laertes. It bewilders me, my lord. But let him come;
It warms the very sickness of my heart,
That I shall live and fling it in his teeth,
'Thus did'st thou!'

King. If it be thus, Laertes—

And how should it not be so? How otherwise?—

Will you be governed by my advice?

Laertes. Yes, my lord,

If you only will not overrule me to make peace.

King. Nought but your own peace. If he be now
returned,

Refusing to pursue his voyage, and if he means
Not again to undertake it, I mean to work him
To an exploit, now completely formed in mind,
Under whose execution he cannot choose but fall;
And for his death no wind of blame shall blow,
But even his mother shall not suspect the plot

And call it an accident.

Laertes. My lord, I will be governed,
Particularly if you could devise it so
That I might be the instrument.

King. It happens rightly.
You have been much talked of since your travels,
And that in Hamlet's hearing, for a talent
Wherein, 'tis said, you shine. The sum of your achievements

Did not together arouse such envy in him,
As did that one, and it, in my regard,
The one of unworthiest rank.

Laertes. What was it, my lord?

King. A very ribbon on the cap of youth,
Yet, needful, too; for youth no less is becoming
To the light and careless livery it wears
Than settled age becomes its sables and its garb,
Suggesting prosperity and gravity. Two months ago
There was here a gentleman from Normandy;—
I've seen myself, and served against, the French,
And they have great skill on horseback; but this gallant
Had witchcraft in his art; he stayed fast in the saddle,
And to such wondrous feats brought his horse
It seemed as if he had been one in body and nature
With the brave animal. So far he surpassed my
imagination,

That I, striving to invent new shapes and tricks,
Came far short of what he did.

Laertes. A Norman, was it?

King. A Norman.

Laertes. Upon my life, Lamond!

King. The very same man.

Laertes. I know him well; he is the jewel, indeed,
The gem of all the nation.

King. He made his confession concerning you,
And gave such report of your mastership
In the art and exercise of self-defense,

That he cried out 'twould be a sight, indeed,
If one could match you. The fencers of their nation,
He vowed, had neither motion, guard, nor eye,
When you opposed them. Sir, this report of his
Did envenom Hamlet so with envy
That he could nothing do but wish and beg
Your immediate coming back, to play with him.
Now, out of this,—

Laertes. What out of this, my lord?

King. Laertes, was your father dear to you?

Or are you like the painting of a sorrow,—

A face without a heart?

Laertes. Why ask this?

King. Not that I think you did not love your father,
But that I know that love begins in time,
And that I see, in instances of experience,
That time moderates the spark and fire of it.
There exists within the very flame of love
A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it,
And nothing maintains a uniform goodness always;
For goodness, growing to excess,
Dies from surfeit. Whatever we desire to do,
We should do at the time; for this 'desire' changes,
And 'has abatements and delays as numerous
As there are tongues, hands, or accidents;
And then the 'should' is like the blood-drawing sigh,
Which injures while it relieves. But, to the bottom
of the ulcer—:

Hamlet is coming back. What would you be willing
to undertake,

To show yourself your father's son in deeds

More than in words?

Laertes. To cut his throat in the church.

King. No place, indeed, should give protection to
murder;

Revenge, on the other hand, should have no bounds.

But, good Laertes,

Only do this: keep closely within your room.
Hamlet, returned, shall know you have come home.
We'll set those on who shall praise your excellence,
And doubly varnish o'er the fame
The Frenchman gave you; will bring you, at last,
together,
And make wagers on your heads. He, being incautious,
Unsuspecting, and free from all conspiring,
Will not examine closely the foils, so that, with ease
Or with a little shuffling, you may choose
A sword unblunted, and, with a treacherous thrust,
Requite him for your father's death.

Laertes.

I will do it;

And for that purpose I'll anoint my sword.
I bought a poisoned ointment from a quack,
So deadly that but to dip a knife in it,
And drawing blood, there is no poultice possible
Compounded from all the herbs that have virtue
From being gathered by moonlight, that can save the
creature from death

That is but scratched with it; I'll touch the point
With this poison, so that, if I wound him slightly,
It will be death to him.

King.

Let us further think of this;

Consider what time and means will be convenient
To enable us to act our parts. If this should fail,
So that our real intent betray itself,
It were better not attempted; therefore this project
Should have a second one to back it, that might work
If the first should burst in its trial. Soft! let me see:
I'll make a solemn wager on your cunning,—
I have it!

When through exercising you are hot and thirsty,—
And make your bouts more violent for that end,—
And when he calls for drink, I'll have in preparation

A goblet for the purpose, wherefrom but sipping,
If he perchance escape your venom'd thrust,
Our object shall be yet gained. But, stay, what noise?

Enter Queen.

How now, sweet queen?

Queen. One woe treads upon another's heel,
So fast do they follow. Your sister's drowned, Laertes.

Laertes. Drowned? O, where?

Queen. There is a willow growing aslant a creek,
That shows its white leaves in the glassy stream;
There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and wild orchids,
That free-spoken shepherds give a coarser name,
But our chaste maids do dead men's fingers call them;
There, on the drooping boughs her coronal wreaths
Clambering to hang, a treacherous sliver broke,
At which down her garlanded trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping creek. Her clothes spread wide,
And, mermaid-like, a while they bore her up;
Meantime she chanted snatches of old psalms,
As though insensible of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and accustomed
To that element; but long it could not be
Until her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious hymn
To muddy death.

Laertes. Alas, then is she drowned?

Queen. Drowned, drowned!

Laertes. Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears; but yet
It is our habit: nature maintains her custom,
Let shame do what it will; when these are dried,
The woman in me will be gone. Adieu, my lord;
I have a speech of fire which would gladly blaze

But that this folly extinguishes it. (*Exit*)

King. Let's follow, Gertrude;

How much I had to do to calm his rage!

Now I fear this will give it a fresh start;

Therefore, let us follow. (*Exeunt*)

ACT V

Scene 1. A churchyard.

Enter two Clowns,¹ with spades, etc.

1 Clown. Is she to be buried in a Christian burial-place who wilfully seeks her own damnation?²

2 Clown. I tell thee she is; and therefore let's make her grave at once. The coroner hath determined her case, and finds it Christian burial.

1 Clown. How can that be, unless she drowned herself as an act of self-defense?

2 Clown. Why, 'tis found so.

1 Clown. It must not be 'se defendendo,' in defending one's self; it cannot be otherwise. For here lies the point: If I drown myself intentionally, it argues an act, and an act hath three divisions: it is, to act, to do, and to perform; therefore, she drowned herself intentionally.

2 Clown. Nay, but listen, goodman delver,——

1 Clown. Give me time. Here lies the water; good. Here stands the man; good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he, will he not, he goes,—mark that; but if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself;

¹ "Clown" in Shakespeare means usually simply a lout, a boor, or what is provincially termed in America a 'clodhopper' or 'bumpkin'. The young student is apt mistakenly to think of a circus clown.

² The humour of this scene is inevitably reduced by making the two Grave-diggers say what they mean, particularly the first, who is always represented on the stage as an ignorant, dirty, villainous-looking but harmless, individual.

therefore, he who is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.

2 *Clown*. But is this the law?

1 *Clown*. Yes, by the Virgin, it is; coroner's inquest law.

2 *Clown*. Will you hear the truth about it? If this had not been a noblewoman, she would not have been buried in a Christian burying-ground.

1 *Clown*. Why, there you speak truth; and more the pity that great folk should have encouragement in this world to drown or hang themselves, more than their fellow-Christians. Come; my spade. There are no gentlemen more ancient than gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers; they continue the profession of Adam.

2 *Clown*. Was he a gentleman? ³

1 *Clown*. He was the first who ever bore arms.

2 *Clown*. Why, he had none.

1 *Clown*. What, art thou a heathen? How dost thou understand the Scripture? The Scripture says, 'Adam digged'; ⁴ how could he dig without arms? I'll put another question to thee. If thou answerest not to the point, confess thyself and be,—

2 *Clown*. Come on.

1 *Clown*. Who is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?

2 *Clown*. The gallows-maker; for that frame outlasts a thousand occupants.

1 *Clown*. I like thy wisdom well, in good faith. The gallows does well; but how does it well? It does

³That is, literally, a "nobleman"? 'Gentle' in Elizabethan English usually connotes 'noble' or 'of good family', from the Latin 'gens', 'family', 'tribe'. The Second Clown asks how a manual labourer could be a 'gentleman'.

⁴Obviously a literary blunder on the part of the First Clown. The allusion is not from the Bible, but an old fourteenth century couplet used by the labour agitators of Chaucer's day:

"When Adam delved, and Eve span,
O who was then the gentleman?"

well to those who do ill: now, thou dost ill to say the gallows is built stronger than the church; therefore, the gallows may do well to thee! To the riddle again; come.

2 *Clown*. 'Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright, or a carpenter?'

1 *Clown*. Yes, tell me that, and your day's work is done.

2 *Clown*. By the Virgin, now I can tell you.

1 *Clown*. To it.

2 *Clown*. By the mass, I cannot tell.

Enter Hamlet and Horatio afar off.

1 *Clown*. Cudgel thy brains no more about it, for a stupid ass will not hasten his pace with beating; and, when you are next asked this question, say, 'A grave-maker'; for the houses which he makes last till doomsday. Go, get thee to Yaughan's, and fetch me a drink of liquor.

(He digs and sings)

'In youth, when I did love, did love,

I thought it was very sweet,

To shorten, O, the time, for-a my benefit,

O, methought there was nothing more fit.' ⁵

Hamlet. Has this fellow no sentiment for his business, that he sings at grave-making?

Horatio. Habit has made it naturally easy for him.

Hamlet. 'Tis even so. The hand uncalled for has the finer sensitiveness.

1 *Clown*. *(Sings)*

'But age, with his stealing steps,

Hath clawed me into his clutch,

⁵ Concerning this passage, Professor John L. Lowes, of Harvard, writes: "The Clown is singing a humorously garbled version of an actual song, attributed to Lord Vaux, and printed in *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557). See the *Variorum* for the real text, which is worth looking up and comparing. The 'O's' and 'Ah's' merely represent the exertion of digging."

And hath shipped me into the land,
As if I had never been young.'

(Tosses up a skull)

Hamlet. That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once. How the knave knocks it on the ground, as though it were the jaw-bone of Cain, who committed the first murder. It might be the pate of a politician, which this fool now outwits; one who tried to circumvent God, might it not?

Horatio. It might, my lord.

Hamlet. Or of a courtier, who could say, 'Good morning, sweet lord! How dost thou, good lord?' This might be my Lord So-and-so, who praised my Lord Such-a-one's horse, when he meant to beg it,—might it not?

Horatio. Ay, my lord.

Hamlet. Why, even so; and now, visiting my Lady Worm; jawless, and knocked about the head with a sexton's spade. Here's fine revolution, if we had the knack of seeing it. Did these bones cost no more in their breeding than to make them fit only for playing at bowls? My own ache to think about it.

1 Clown. *(Sings)*

'A pick-axe, and a spade, a spade,
For and a shrouding sheet;
O, a pit of clay for to be made
For such a guest is meet.'

(Tosses up another skull)

Hamlet. There's another one; why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where are his subtleties now, his quibbles, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks? Why does he allow this rude knave now to knock him about the pate with a dirty shovel, and will not give a reason for his action of unlawful beating? Hum! This fellow might be in his time a great buyer of land with his statutes,

his bonds of surety, his fines, his double promissories, his recoveries. Is this the fine of his fines, and the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt? ⁶ Will his vouchers now vouchsafe to him no more his purchases, and doubly executed ones, too, than the length and breadth of a perforated parchment? The very deeds of conveyance to his land will scarcely be contained in this box, and must the owner thereof have no more, ha?

Horatio. Not one iota more, my lord.

Hamlet. Is not parchment made of sheep-skin?

Horatio. Yes, my lord, and of calf-skin, too.

Hamlet. Well, they are only sheep and calves who seek security in legal parchments. I will speak to this fellow. Whose grave is this, sir?

I Clown. Mine, sir.

(Sings) 'O, a pit of clay for to be made
For such a guest is meet.'

Hamlet. I think it must be thine, indeed, for thou liest in it.

I Clown. You are lying out of it, sir, and therefore it is not yours. For my part, I do not lie in it, and yet it is mine.

Hamlet. Thou liest about it, to be in it, and yet say it is thine. 'Tis for the dead, not the living; therefore, thou liest.

I Clown. 'Tis a speedy lie, sir; it will fly away again, from me to you.⁷

Hamlet. For what man dost thou dig it?

I Clown. For no man, sir.

Hamlet. For what woman, then?

⁶ Observe the fourfold pun on "fine". The first 'fine' means "end" (Latin, *finis*), the second is the legal term, the third means 'elegant', and the fourth, 'pulverized'.

⁷ The scene here is a sharp contrast between natural, unconscious wit on the part of the Clown, and the cultivated, intellectual wit of Hamlet.

I Clown. For no woman, either.

Hamlet. Who is to be buried in it?

I Clown. One who was a woman, sir; but, rest her soul in peace, she's dead.

Hamlet. How precise the knave is! We must speak with exactness, or ambiguity will undo us. By the Lord, Horatio, I have noticed it these past three years; the age has grown so finical that the peasant races the courtier so hard in imitating his wit that he steps on his heel.⁸ How long hast thou been a grave-maker?⁹

I Clown. Of all days in the year, I came to it that day our late King Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

Hamlet. How long since is that?

I Clown. Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell that. It was the very day that young Hamlet was born; he who is mad, and sent to England.

Hamlet. Yes, by the Virgin,—why was he sent into England?

I Clown. Why, because he was mad. He shall recover his wits there; or, if he do not, it's no great matter there.

⁸Literally, "galls his chilblain".

⁹"Note that throughout this dialogue Hamlet addresses the Clown in the second person singular, while the Clown replies in the second person plural" (Furness). In Elizabethan days this pronominal distinction was maintained, and it is comparatively unfamiliar to the modern reader. The difference is that roughly of the uses of the same pronouns in modern French and German. "Thou" is used in addressing persons with affection, familiarity, or condescension. "You" is used in serious discourse with those usually of equal social rank. For instance, note the following from *The Merchant of Venice*, II, ii, 140, 141:

Gratiano. I have a suit to you.

Bassanio. You have obtained it.

Gratiano. Nay, you must not deny me: I must go
With you to Belmont.

Bassanio. Why, then, you must. But hear thee, Gratiano:

Thou art too wild, too rude, and bold of voice, etc.,

See Abbott's *Shakespearean Grammar* for an exhaustive discussion of this matter.

Hamlet. Why?

I Clown. 'Twill not be noticed in him there; there everybody is as crazy as he.

Hamlet. How did he become mad?

I Clown. Very strangely, they say.

Hamlet. How 'strangely'?

I Clown. Faith, even by losing his wits.

Hamlet. Upon what ground?

I Clown. Why, here in Denmark.¹⁰ I have been sexton here, both man and boy, thirty years.

Hamlet. How long will a man lie in the earth before he rots?

I Clown. In faith, if he be not rotten before he die,—we have many pocky corpses nowadays that will scarcely hold together while being laid in,¹¹—he will last you some eight or nine year; a tanner will last you nine year.

Hamlet. Why he more than another?

I Clown. Why, sir, his hide is so tanned with his trade that it will keep out water a great while; and water is a sore decayer of your whoreson dead body. Here's a skull, now; this skull has lain in the earth three-and-twenty years.

Hamlet. Whose was it?

I Clown. A whoreson mad fellow's it was. Whose do you think it was?

Hamlet. Nay, I do not know.

I Clown. A pestilence take him for a mad rogue! He poured a bowl of Rhenish wine on my head once. This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the king's jester.

Hamlet. This?

I Clown. Even that?

¹⁰ The best example in the whole scene of the difference between native wit and cultivated wit.

¹¹ An echo of the plagues,—smallpox and bubonic,—that frequently swept Europe and England for several centuries before and after the time of Shakespeare?

Hamlet. Let me see it. (*Taking the skull*) Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him well, Horatio; a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He has borne me on his back a thousand times; and now how abhorrent in my imagination this is! My stomach rebels from it. Here hung those lips I have kissed I know not how oft. Where are your gibes now, your frolicsome gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that used to set the table all in a roar? Not one, now, to mock your own grinning? Quite chap-fallen? Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her to paint an inch thick, to make this appearance in company: make her laugh at that! I pray thee, Horatio, tell me one thing.

Horatio. What is it, my lord?

Hamlet. Dost thou think Alexander looked after this fashion in the earth?

Horatio. Even so.

Hamlet. And smelled so? pah! (*Puts down the skull*)

Horatio. Even so, my lord.

Hamlet. To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till one find it stopping a bung-hole?

Horatio. 'Twere to think too fancifully, to imagine so.

Hamlet. No, in faith, not an iota, if one follow him there temperately enough, with probability to lead him; as, thus: Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returns to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make clay, and why not of that same clay whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel?

Imperial Cæsar, dead and turned to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away;

O, that that earth, which kept the world
in awe,
Should patch a wall to expel the winter's
flaw!

But soft! but soft! Aside! here comes the king,

*Enter Priests, etc., in procession; the corpse of Ophelia;
Laertes and Mourners following; King, Queen,
their trains, etc.*

The queen, the courtiers. Who is it that they are
following,
And with such incomplete rites? This betokens
That the corpse they follow did with desperate hand
Undo its own life. 'Twas of some rank.
Let us crouch down awhile, and watch.

(Retiring with Horatio)

Laertes. What ceremony more than this?

Hamlet. That is Laertes, a very noble youth; listen.

Laertes. What ceremony else?

1 Priest. Her obsequies have been as far expanded
As we have church warrant. Her mode of death was
doubtful;

And, except that the king's command overrules church
law,

She should have been lodged in ground unsanctified
Till the last trumpet; for prayers of charity,
Broken pottery, flintstones, and pebbles should have
been thrown on her.

Yet, here she is allowed her virginal garlands,
And strewing of flowers, and the bringing to her last
home

Of bell and burial.¹²

¹² "In these words reference is still made to the marriage rites which in the case of maidens are sadly parodied in the funeral rites" (Clarendon).

Laertes. Must there no more be done?

Priest. No more be done.

We would profane the service for the dead

To sing a requiem and such rest to her

As to souls departed in peace.

Laertes. Lay her in the earth,

And from her fair and unpolluted flesh

May violets spring! I tell thee, churlish priest,

A ministering angel shall my sister be

When thou liest howling in torment.¹⁸

Hamlet. What, the fair Ophelia!

Queen. Sweets to the sweet; farewell!

(Scattering flowers)

I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife;

I thought thy bridal bed to have decked, sweet maid,

And not to have strewed thy grave.

Laertes. O treble woe,

Fall ten times treble on that cursed head

Whose wicked deed thy keen reason

Deprived thee of! Hold off the earth awhile,

Till I have caught her once more in my arms.

(Leaps into the grave)

Now pile your dust on living and on dead,

Till on this flat place a mountain you have made

To overtop old Pelion, or the sky-aspiring head

Of blue Olympus.

Hamlet. (Advancing) Who is he whose grief

Bears such an emphasis, whose expression of grief

Adjures the moving planets and makes them stand

Like wonder struck listeners? This is I,

Hamlet, the Dane! *(Leaps into the grave)*

Laertes. The devil take thy soul! *(Grappling with him)*

Hamlet. Thou prayest not well.

¹⁸ The Priest here makes a gesture of horror, and retires from the stage with his fellows. Compare Laertes' sentiment with the last verse of Kipling's *Gunga Din*.

I pray thee take thy fingers from my throat;
 For, though I am not hot-tempered or rash,
 Yet I have something in me dangerous,
 Which let thy wisdom fear. Take away thy hand!
King. Pull them apart.

Queen. Hamlet! Hamlet!

All. Gentlemen,—

Horatio. My good lord, quiet yourself.
 (*The Attendants part them, and they come out of the grave*)

Hamlet. Why, I will fight him on this theme
 Until my eyelids will no longer wink.

Queen. O my son, upon what theme?

Hamlet. I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
 Could not, with all their quantity of love,
 Equal my sum. What wilt thou do for her?

King. O, he is mad, Laertes.

Queen. For love of God, regard him with forbear-
 ance!

Hamlet. Zounds! Show me what thou'lt do:
 Wouldst weep? wouldst fight? wouldst fast? wouldst
 tear thy flesh?

Wouldst drink the vinegar and gall?¹⁴ eat a croco-
 dile?¹⁵

I'll do it. Dost thou come here to whine?
 To outface me by leaping into her grave?
 Be buried alive with her, and so will I;
 And, if thou prate of mountains, let them throw
 Millions of acres on us, till our mound,
 Singeing its pate against the sun's own sphere,
 Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, and if thou'lt bluster,
 I'll rant as well as thou.

¹⁴ "With the exception of the *dram of eale*, no word or phrase in this tragedy has occasioned more discussion than this *esill* ('vinegar-and-gall' of the Quartos) or *esile* (in the Folio), which as it stands, represents nothing in heaven above, or the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth" (Furness).

¹⁵ For 'crocodile', see *Romeo and Juliet*, V, i, 43.

Queen. This is sheer madness,
And in this way awhile the fit will work on him.
Soon, as patient as the female dove
When her golden pair of nestlings have hatched out,
His silence will sit drooping.

Hamlet. Hear you, sir;
What is your reason for using me thus?
I ever loved you. But it is no matter:
Let Hercules himself do what he may,
The cat will mew, and the dog will have his day.¹⁶

(Exit)

King. I pray you, good Horatio, attend upon him.

(Exit Horatio)

(To Laertes) Strengthen your patience with our last
night's speech;
We put the whole affair to an immediate test.
Good Gertrude, set some watch over your son.
This grave shall have a living monument.¹⁷
An hour of quiet shall we shortly see;
Till then, in patience may our proceeding be. *(Exeunt)*

Scene 2. A hall in the castle.

Enter Hamlet and Horatio.

Hamlet. So much for this, sir; now you shall hear
about the other affair.

Do you recall all the circumstances?

Horatio. Recall it, my lord!

¹⁶ "Nature will assert itself in spite of Herculean efforts to prevent it".

¹⁷ Wright, in the Clarendon commentary, says that 'living' is probably twofold in meaning, "first, that of 'enduring', as the Queen would understand it; secondly, Laertes would be cognizant of the deeper meaning, by which the life of Hamlet is menaced".

Hamlet. Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
That would not let me sleep. It seemed to me I lay.
Worse than the mutineers in irons. Hastily,—
And praised be that haste which lets us know
That our indiscretion sometimes serves us well
When our deep-laid plots do fail; and that should
teach us

There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.¹⁸

Horatio. That's most certain.

Hamlet. Hastily, up from my cabin,
My sea-gown scarfed about me, in the dark
I groped to discover the letters; had my desire,
Seized their packet, and, in fine, withdrew
To my own room again; making so bold,
Since my fears caused me to forget all manners, to
unseal

Their grand commission; and there I found,
Horatio,—

O royal knavery!—an exact command,
Ornamented with many separate sorts of reasons
Relative to the welfare of Denmark, and England, too,
With, ho! such bugbears and goblins as long as I lived,
That, on first reading, no time allowed,
No, not to wait for the grinding of the axe,
My head should be struck off.

Horatio. Is it possible!

Hamlet. Here's the commission; read it at more
leisure.

But will you hear how I proceeded?

Horatio. I beseech you.

Hamlet. Being thus enmeshed in a net of vil-
lainies,—

¹⁸ Hamlet's intuition of impending evil he attributes to an over-
shadowing Providence who guided his actions then, and has
throughout the drama. God is the Great Sculptor. Man, a
common, inferior workman, may roughly hew out his life, but far
higher skill is required to "finish" the work.

And before my brain could map out any preliminary plan,

It was acting on impulse,—I sat down;
Devised a new commission, and wrote it fairly well.
I once considered it, as our statesmen do,
A baseness to write well, and laboured much
To forget that learning; but, sir, now
It performed substantial service. Will you know
The import of what I wrote?

Horatio. Yes, my good lord.

Hamlet. A most earnest adjuration from the king,
As England was his faithful tributary,
As love between them like the palm might flourish,
As peace should still her wheaten garland wear,
And be a link between their friendship,
And many similar 'as-es' of great moment,
That, on first view and knowledge of these contents,
Without discussion further, more or less,
He should the bearers put to sudden death,
No time for shrift allowed.

Horatio. How was this sealed?

Hamlet. Why, even that was ordered by heaven.
I had my father's signet in my purse
Which was a duplicate of the Danish seal:
I folded the writing up in the form of the other,
Signed it, made the impress, and restored it safely;
The change was never known. Now, the next day
Was our sea-fight; and what followed this
You know already.

Horatio. So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to death.

Hamlet. Why, man, they made love to this employment;

They are not on my conscience; their destruction
Grows out of their own meddling.
'Tis perilous when the inferior nature comes
Between the thrust and sword-points

Of mighty opponents engaged in mortal combat.

Horatio. Why, what a king this is!

Hamlet. Does it not, think you, rest upon me
now,—

He who has killed my father, and stained my mother,
Popped in between the election to the throne and my
prospects,

Thrown out a bait for my own life,
And with such duplicity,—is it not to be done with
perfect conscience

To repay him with this arm? and is it not to be
damned,

To permit this cancer of humanity

To proceed in further mischief?

Horatio. It must be shortly known to him from
England

The outcome of the business there.

Hamlet. It will be short; the interim is mine,

And a man's life is worth no more than to say 'One.'

But I am very sorry, good Horatio,

That toward Laertes I forgot myself;

For in the mirror of my cause I see

The reflection of his. I'll court again his favour;

But, certainly, the bravado of his grief threw me
Into a towering passion.

Horatio. Peace! Who comes here?

Enter young Osric.

Osric. Your lordship is quite welcome back to Denmark.

Hamlet. I thank you, sir, most humbly. Do you
know this busybody?

Horatio. No, my good lord.

Hamlet. Your state is all the more gracious, for it
is a shortcoming to know him. He owns much
land, and fertile; only let a base person be

supremely base, and he shall find a place at the king's table. He is a churl, but, as I say, he owns an immense amount of land.

Osric. Sweet lord, if your lordship be at leisure, I must impart a matter to you from his majesty.

Hamlet. I will receive it, sir, with all diligence of spirit. Put your bonnet to its right use; 'tis for the head.

Osric. I thank your lordship: it is very hot.

Hamlet. No, believe me, it is very cold; the wind is northerly.

Osric. It is moderately cold, my lord, indeed.

Hamlet. But yet I think it is very sultry and hot for my constitution.

Osric. Excessively, my lord; it is very sultry,—as it were,—I cannot tell how. But, my lord, his majesty bade me to signify to you that he has laid a great wager on your head. Sir, this is the affair,——

Hamlet. I beseech you, remember the rules of courtesy,——

(Hamlet moves him to put on his hat)

Osric. No, for my comfort, in good faith; in good faith, for my comfort's sake. Sir, there has newly come to court Laertes; believe me, an absolute gentleman, full of diverse excellences, lovely to associate with, and of fine appearance: indeed, to speak feelingly of him, he is the guide and preceptor of gentility, for in him you shall find the sum and substance of all good qualities which a gentleman would like to display.

Hamlet. Sir, your description of him suffers no deficiency on your part; though, I know, to enumerate inventorially his characteristics would dizzy the memory, as a yawing craft fails to overtake a swift sailer. But, in extolling him to him to be a soul of great combina

essential virtues to be so rare, as, to tell truth about him, to make his reflection in the mirror the only resemblance to him, and nothing but his own shadow can keep pace with him.

Osric. Your lordship speaks most infallibly concerning him.

Hamlet. What is the upshot of all this, sir? Why should we wrap this gentleman in our more inexperienced breath?

Osric. Sir?

Horatio. Is it not possible to understand each other in simpler language? You can do it, sir, really.

Hamlet. What does the mention of this gentleman import?

Osric. Of Laertes?

Horatio. His purse is empty already; all his golden words are spent.

Hamlet. Of him, sir.

Osric. I know you are not ignorant,—

Hamlet. I wish you did, sir; yet, in faith, if you did, it would not much commend me. Well, sir?

Osric. You are not ignorant of such excellence as Laertes is,—

Hamlet. I dare not confess that, lest I should seek to compare to him in excellence; but if I understood any man well, I would understand myself.

Osric. I mean, sir, as regards his weapon; in the reputation it gives him, he is without a peer.

Hamlet. What's his weapon?

Osric. Rapier and dagger.

Hamlet. Those are two of his weapons; but, go on.

Osric. The king, sir, has wagered with him six Barbary horses, against which he has staked, as I take it, six French rapiers and poinards, with their trappings, such as girdle, hangers, and so on. Three of the carriages, in faith, are very appealing to fancy, matching well the hilts, most deli-

cately wrought carriages, and of quite elaborate design.

Hamlet. What do you call the carriages?

Horatio. I knew you would need some marginal notes before you were through.

Osric. The carriages, sir, are the hangers.

Hamlet. The word would be more relevant to the matter, if we could carry cannon by our sides; I hope it may be hangers until then. But, go on: six Barbary horses against six French swords, their trappings, and three elaborately wrought carriages; that's the French bet against the Danish. Why is this 'staked'?

Osric. The king, sir, has laid a wager that in a dozen passes between yourself and Laertes he shall not exceed you three hits; he has bet on twelve against nine; and it would take place immediately if your lordship would vouchsafe 'acceptance.'

Hamlet. What if I do not accept?

Osric. I mean, my lord, the actual opposition of your person in trial.

Hamlet. Sir, I shall be walking here in the hall; if it please his majesty, 'tis my regular hour for exercise. If the foils be brought, the gentleman willing, and the king maintain his purpose, I will win for him if I can; if not, I'll gain nothing but my own humiliation and the awkward hits to my credit.

Osric. Shall I re-deliver your sentiments thus?

Hamlet. To this effect, sir; after that you may add whatever flourishes your nature demands.

Osric. I commend my duty to your lordship.

Hamlet. Yours, yours. (*Exit Osric*) He does well to commend it himself; there are no other tongues which will serve that term.

Horatio. This young lapwing runs away with the shell yet on his head.

Hamlet. He would compliment his mother's breast before he nursed at it. Thus he has, with a whole bevy of others whom I know the frothy age dotes on, only adopted the fashionable mode of speech and external tricks of conversation; superficial knowledge and superficial language, which wins them the approval of the most foolish and over-refined judgments; but blow them up in a real test, and the bubbles burst.

Enter a Lord.

Lord. My lord, his majesty has just commended himself to you by young Osric, who has returned word that you are awaiting him in the hall. He again sends to learn whether it is your pleasure to hold sword-play with Laertes, or whether you desire to delay awhile.

Hamlet. I am constant to my purpose; it follows the king's pleasure: if his convenience summon, mine is ready; now or whensoever he pleases, provided I am as able then as now.

Lord. The king, queen, and all are coming down.

Hamlet. Just in time.

Lord. The queen desires that you try some conciliating conduct toward Laertes before you fall to fencing.

Hamlet. She instructs me well.

Horatio. You will lose this wager, my lord.

Hamlet. I do not think so; since he went to France, I have been in continual practice. I shall win at the odds. But you would not think how foreboding my heart feels; but it does not matter.

Horatio. Nay, my good lord,—

Hamlet. It is but foolery: such kind of misgiving as would perhaps trouble a woman.

atio. If your mind dislike anything, obey its warn-

ing. I will forestall their repairing hither, and say you are not fit.

Hamlet. Not a whit; we defy augury. There's a special Providence in the fall of a sparrow.¹⁹ If it be now, 'tis not yet to come; if it be not yet to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come; the readiness is everything. Since no man takes away any of his earthly possessions, what matter if he leave early? Never mind.

Enter King, Queen, Laertes, Lords, Osric, and other Attendants with foils and gauntlets; a table with bowls of wine on it is brought in.

King. Come, Hamlet, come, and take this hand from me.

(King puts Laertes' hand into Hamlet's)

Hamlet. Give me your pardon, sir: I've done you wrong;

But pardon it, as you are a gentleman.

Those present know,

And you necessarily have heard, how I am afflicted

With severe dementia. What I have done,

That might your nature, sense of honour, and repugnance

Rudely awaken, I here proclaim was madness.

Was it Hamlet who wronged Laertes? Not the true Hamlet!

If Hamlet be subtracted from himself,

And when not his real self does wrong Laertes,

Then Hamlet does it not himself, and denies it.

Who does it, then? His madness. If it be so,

The true Hamlet is one of the faction who is wronged;

His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.

Sir, before this assemblage,

Let my disclaimer of intentional evil

¹⁹ See Matthew 10: 29.

Exonerate me so far in your generous thoughts,
As to think that accidentally I shot my arrow
O'er the house, and hurt my brother.²⁰

Laertes. I am satisfied as to my personal feelings,
The sting of whose motive, in this case, would stir
me most

To my revenge; but on technical grounds of honour
I stand aloof, and will make no reconciliation
Until by elder authorities on the code of honour
I have received a judgment backed by precedent,
That can make peace with an unstained name.

But, till that time,
I do receive your proffered love as love,
And will not wrong it.

Hamlet. I do embrace it freely,
And will this brotherly wager frankly play.
Give us the foils. Come on.

Laertes. Come, one for me.

Hamlet. I'll be your foil, Laertes; in my ignorance
of the art

Your skill shall, like a star in the darkest night,
Be brilliantly set off, indeed.

Laertes. You mock me, sir.

Hamlet. No, by this hand, I do not.

King. Give them the foils, young Osric. Son Hamlet,
You know the wager?

Hamlet. Very well, my lord;

²⁰ This speech has given rise to much scholarly controversy. Neilson asserts that Hamlet deliberately lies, though it is true that he did not intentionally kill Polonius (Lake Ed., *Hamlet*, p. 271). Professor Lowes quotes Dr. Johnson, who wishes Hamlet had made some other excuse to Laertes than the false one of madness. But Lowes defends Hamlet rightly on the ground that, in the execution of his purpose, there is no other reason that he could give. In line 73, Hamlet still shows his intent to carry out his promise to the Ghost: "to tell the truth now would be to defeat that design at the crucial moment" (Lowes: *Hamlet*, in *English Reading Series*, p. 240, Henry Holt & Co., 1914). Every critic admits the absolute sincerity, otherwise, of Hamlet's disclaimer.

Your grace has offered odds on the weaker opponent.

King. I do not fear it; I have seen you both;

But since he has improved, we have the advantage on points.

Laertes. This is too heavy; let me see another.

Hamlet. This one pleases me well. These foils all have a uniform length?

(They prepare to play)

Osric. Yes, my good lord.

King. Set the bowls of wine upon that table.

Should Hamlet give the first or second hit,

Or repay him by returning the third thrust,

Let all the battlements their ordnance sound.

The king shall drink to Hamlet's health,

And in the cup a costly pearl shall throw

Richer than that which four successive kings

In Denmark's crown have worn. Give me the cups;

And let the kettle-drum to trumpet speak,

The trumpet to the cannoneer without,

The cannons to the heavens, the heaven again to earth,

'Now drinks the king to Hamlet!' Come, begin;

And you, the judges, keep a wary eye.

Hamlet. Come on, sir.

Laertes. Come, my lord. *(They fence)*

Hamlet. One.

Laertes. No.

Hamlet. Judgment.

Osric. A hit, a very palpable hit.

Laertes. Well; again.

King. Stay; give me drink. Hamlet, this pearl is yours;

Here's health to you.

(Trumpets sound, and cannon shot off within)

Give him the cup.

Hamlet. I'll play this bout first; set it aside for awhile.

Come. *(They play)* Another hit; what say you?

Laertes. A touch, a touch, I do confess.

King. Our son shall win.

Queen. He's fat and scant in breath.
Here, Hamlet, take my handkerchief, and wipe your brow;

The queen drinks to your success, Hamlet.

Hamlet. Thank you, madam.

King. Gertrude, do not drink!

Queen. I will, my lord; I pray you, pardon me.

King. (Aside) It is the poisoned cup; it is too late.

Hamlet. I dare not drink yet, madam; but by and by.

Queen. Come, let me wipe your face.

Laertes. My lord, I'll hit him now.

King. I do not think so.

Laertes. (Aside) And yet 'tis almost against my conscience.

Hamlet. Come, for the third bout, Laertes: you merely dally;

I pray you, thrust with your utmost violence;

I fear you are treating me like a child.

Laertes. Do you say that? Come on.

Osric. Nothing decisive thus far, either way.

Laertes. Have at you now!

(Laertes wounds Hamlet; then, in scuffling, they accidentally exchange rapiers, and Hamlet wounds Laertes)

King. Separate them; they are incensed.

Hamlet. Nay, come, again. *(Queen falls)*

Osric. Look to the queen there, ho!

Horatio. Both have drawn blood. How is it with you, my lord?

Osric. How is it with you, Laertes?

Laertes. Why, as with a woodcock fast in its own snare, Osric;

I am justly killed by my own treachery.

Hamlet. How does the queen?

King. She swoons to see them bleed.

Queen. No, no, the drink, the drink—O my dear Hamlet—

The drink, the drink! I am poisoned. (*Dies*)

Hamlet. O villainy! Ho! let the door be locked!

Treachery! seek it out. (*Laertes falls*)

Laertes. It is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain;
No medicine in the world can do thee good;

In thee there is not half an hour of life:

The treacherous instrument is in thy hand,

Unblunted and envenomed. The foul plot

Hath turned itself on me. Lo, here I lie,

Never to rise again. Thy mother's poisoned!

I can say no more. The king, the king's to blame.

Hamlet. And the point envenomed, too!

Then, venom, to thy work! (*Stabs King*)

All. Treason! treason!

King. O, yet defend me, friends! I am only hurt.

Hamlet. Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,

Drink down this potion! (*Forcing King to drink*)

This holds thy precious pearl!

- Follow my mother! (*King dies*)

Laertes. He is justly served;

It is a poison compounded by himself.

Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet;

May mine and my father's day come not upon thee,

Nor thine on me! ²¹ (*Dies*)

²¹ And thus Hamlet finally achieves his revenge. The reader will have noticed that the Ghost has not appeared since the scene in the Queen's boudoir (III-iv). As Masefield has said, Hamlet is neither weak nor impractical, but has hesitated because the deed has involved from the start "a defilement of personal ideals, difficult for a wise mind to justify. . . . Revenge and chance together restore life to her course, by a destruction of the lives too beastly, and of the lives too hasty, and of the lives too foolish, and of the life too wise, to be all together on earth at the same time." (John Masefield: *Shakespeare*, pp. 162-167, Henry Holt & Co., 1911).

Hamlet. May Heaven make thee free of it! I follow thee.
I am dying, Horatio. Wretched queen, adieu!
You who look pale and are trembling at this scene,
Who are either the audience or the mute performers
in this act,

Had I but time—but this stern deputy, Death,
Is strict in his arrests—O, I could tell you—
But let it be. Horatio, I am dead;
Thou livest: report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied.

Horatio. Never believe it;
I am more an antique Roman than a Dane:
Here's yet some liquor left.

Hamlet. As thou art a man,
Give me the cup. Let go; by heaven, I'll have it.
O, good Horatio! what a dishonoured name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Deny thyself heaven's happiness for awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story.

(March afar off, and peal of ordnance within)

What warlike noise is this?

Osric. Young Fortinbras, in conquest come from
Poland,

To the ambassadors from England gives
This warlike salute.

Hamlet. O, I die, Horatio;
The potent poison quite overcomes my spirit.
I cannot live to hear the news from England;
But I do prophesy that the election falls
To Fortinbras; he has my dying approval;
So tell him, with the events, more or less,
Which have prompted my choice,—the rest is silence.

(Dies)

Horatio. Now breaks a noble heart. Good night,
sweet prince,

And flights of angels accompany thee to thy rest!

(March within)

Why does the drum come this direction?

Enter Fortinbras, and the English Ambassadors, with drums, colours, and Attendants.

Fortinbras. Where is this sight?

Horatio. What is it that you wish to see?

If anything resembling woe or wonder, cease your search.

Fortinbras. This heap of slain proclaims great slaughter. O proud Death,

What feast is prepared in thy eternal cell,

That thou so many princes at a shot

Hast so bloodily struck down?

1 Ambassador.

The sight is dismal;

And our affairs from England come too late.

The ears are insensible that should give us hearing

To tell him his commandment is fulfilled,

That Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.

From whom should we receive our thanks?

Horatio.

Not from his mouth,

Had it the ability of life to thank you.

He never gave commandment for their death.

But since, so closely after this bloody affair,

You from the Polish wars, and you from England,

Have arrived here, give an order that these bodies

High on a platform be placed in public view;

And let me speak to the yet unknowing world

How these things came about. So you shall hear.

Of sensual, bloody, and unnatural acts,

Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,

Of deaths instigated by cunning and unjustifiable causes;

And, in this final issue, purposes misdirected

Rebounding upon the inventors' heads: all I can

Most truly relate.

Fortinbras.

Let us hasten to hear it,

And call the noblest of the realm to audience.

For myself, with sorrow I embrace good fortune.

I have some rights which must be remembered in this kingdom,

Which now to claim, my opportunity invites me.

Horatio. Of that also I shall have cause to speak,

And from the mouth of him whose desire will be seconded by others;

And let all this be performed at once,

While men's minds are wild, lest more mischance,

A consequence of plots and errors, happen.

Fortinbras.

Let four captains

Bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the platform;

For he was likely, had he been elevated to the throne,

To have proved most like a king; and, for his death,

The soldiers' music and military rites

Speak loudly for him.

Take up the bodies. Such a sight as this,

Becomes a battlefield, but here seems much amiss.

Go, bid the soldiers salute.

(Dead march played. Exeunt, conveying the dead bodies; after which a peal of ordnance is shot off.)

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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